THE LONG ARM OF THE STATE:

TIBETAN DIASPORA

AND TRANSNATIONAL HEGEMONY

A THESIS

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BY

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ABSTRACT

THESIS: The Long Arm of the State: Tibetan Diaspora and Transnational Hegemony

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This study presents a review of digital technologies and their globalizing effects regarding Tibetans living in diaspora. Specifically, this research involves Tibetan-Americans living in the mid-western United States and their responses to the use of digital technology in diasporic cultural maintenance and transnational hegemony. Two topics of interest are primarily dealt with herein. First, the issue of digital technology and its use in global surveillance and political suppression, specifically regarding conflicts between Chinese state apparatuses and diasporic Tibetan activist groups. Second, this thesis shows the various ways Tibetans in diaspora use digital technology to negotiate, maintain, and participate in their cultural community. In this way, the thesis demonstrates both the freeing and constricting effects digital technologies bring to social groups in the digital age.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to every freedom technologist and activist resisting totalitarianism and every Tibetan who has ever fought to be heard.

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I am infinitely grateful to my partner, Cassie, for her unwavering support during my time in graduate school. Her selfless and total support has encouraged me in both highs and lows of my professional growth and I am forever grateful for this.

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Finally, I would like to thank my participants who gave me a look into their lives and made this thesis possible. I am incredibly grateful for their insights and the opportunity to learn from them.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction

In March of 2018, I read an article in the Wall Street Journal entitled “Marriott Employee Roy Jones Hit ‘Like.’ Then China Got Mad.” I was intrigued because of my interest in digital anthropology and the geographic region of central Asia. I was curious to find how an American hotel employee could draw the ire of an entire nation-state through a seemingly isolated act on social media. Though, as this thesis will show, no act on social media is truly isolated. Doubly interesting to me was that Mr. Jones’ sin dealt with the issue of Tibet, a political sore spot for the Chinse Communist Party and an issue I had studied previously.

Ma (2018a) explained that Roy Jones, a social media consultant for Marriot, had recently shared a survey with the company’s Twitter audience. In order to ascertain the most profitable place to build new hotels, the survey asked users to list which countries they would be most interested in traveling. This survey listed both Taiwan and Tibet as separate countries, an idea that the Chinese government disdains and actively acts against. That in and of itself might not have been so problematic, but matters were complicated when a Tibetan activist group (one that advocates for the sovereignty of Tibetans within China), called “Friends of Tibet”, congratulated Marriot for this distinction (Figure 1.1). Roy Jones, who works nights for the chain and stated that he ‘likes’ upwards of 300 tweets per shift, ‘liked’ this aforementioned tweet, tacitly endorsing the notion of Tibetan sovereignty (as China views such activist groups as separatists) (Ma 2018a).

Very likely, Jones was simply going through the motions of his daily digital routine, but the consequences of his actions were tangible. In the days following, Marriot would be bombarded by hundreds of angry Chinese-aligned Twitter users as well as drawing the

Figure 1.1

condemnation of Chinese government officials. Marriot publicly apologized, stating that the original survey that listed Tibet as a separate country was an accident, and terminated the employment of Roy Jones. Chinese authorities were seemingly appeased, but Marco Rubio, an American Senator from Florida, responded negatively to Jones' firing on his own Twitter account, claiming that this was "the long arm of China" (Figure 1.2).

Elsewhere, I have summarized the importance of this event as showing how the simple act of engaging with a 'tweet' on a digital media platform becomes the flashpoint of a complex geopolitical process that lost a man his job; lost the company doing business in China revenue; and elicited a response from a US government official on the same platform (Keck 2018).

Figure 1.2

This event exemplifies many of the questions I wish to explore in this thesis. First, how is transnational state hegemony affected by digital technology? In this case, an American social media coordinator working for $14 an hour was fired due to pressure from a foreign nation-state. This would be unheard of without social media and other connecting digital technologies which increase both the scope and scale of globalization. This will increasingly become our reality and begs the question of whether any of us have the luxury of escaping transnational hegemony and geopolitics in the digital age.

Second, since this subject primarily affects Tibetans and Tibetan refugees, what are their responses to these processes? This second question forms a large part of my research which seeks to understand how marginalized populations use technology to their advantage when confronted with transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), hegemony, and globalized politics. In addition, I address how such technologies fundamentally change the

culture of communities in diaspora. This topic touches on subjects such as contested history and ethnolinquistics, which I examine in Chapter 3. Paramount among my interests in this subject is the concept of agency within marginalized communities and to what extent digital technologies allow such agency to flourish. However, as I have noted above, these technologies also allow for constraints and oppression of the same communities.

Finally, this research is intended to be applicable to a broad range of areas of anthropological interest such as diaspora, refugees, and political economy studies. I am a digital anthropologist and, as such, my focus is on human actors and the ways in which they use technology. That theme, more than any other, runs through the length of this text.

Literature Review

History and Historiography

While this study is not specifically historical in nature, the deeply contested history of Tibet and its sovereignty as a nation is important in understanding the maintenance of Tibetan diaspora online or off. Since 1959, after a failed Tibetan uprising against the occupying People's Liberation Army (PLA), after which the Dalai Lama fled Tibet into exile, the legitimacy of Tibetan or Chinese sovereignty over the Tibetan plateau has been a crucial debate for both camps. I will examine these events a bit more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

Among Tibetans in diaspora, history is social as well as political, forming the underpinning of a shared historical memory and community (Shakya 1999; Smith Jr. 1997; McGranahan 2005, 2010). In his examination of the historiography of the subject, John Powers (2004) notes that history is a tool of political control used by both sides in an attempt to exert their own perspectives. He notes that it is "history as propaganda" and evidences, as other scholars have, how a shared historical memory (even a flawed one) matters deeply to, not just

refugees, but all cultures and nationalities (McGranahan 2005, 2010; Smith Jr. 1997, 2008, 2010; van Shaik 2011).

Several scholars have attempted to write objective histories of the contentious subject of Tibetan independence, each receiving their fair share of criticism from one side or the other. Some argue squarely that, previous to the 1951 occupation of Tibet by the People's Liberation Army of China, Tibet was an independent territory (Norbu 1987; Shakya 1999; Smith Jr. 1997). Others argue that the subject is more complex, with *de jure* claims to the territory on both sides, but generally agreeing that Tibet was a part of Qing Dynasty China (Goldstein 1997; Powers 2004). Chinese sources generally point to either the Manchu Dynasty or the marriage of the Chinese Princess Wencheng to the Tibetan Emperor Songsten Gampo in 641 CE as points in which Tibet was absorbed into China. Tibetans dismiss these outright, arguing that the Manchu dynasty was actually a Mongol occupation of China, meaning they were no more under Chinese rule than the Han (Norbu 1987). The princess argument is generally dismissed due to the series of events which led to the marriage. In short, the Tibetan Empire defeated the Chinese Empire of the time and the marriage was agreed to for diplomacy's sake (Beckwith 1987).

Regardless, each side has its perspective and sticks to it. Indeed, at this point, focusing on specific historical detail seems to miss the point. All knowledge is couched in subjectivity (Haraway 1988), but, according to Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob (1994) "because history and historical evidence are so crucial to people's sense of identity, the evidence itself often becomes the focus of struggle" (5). Therefore, this debate is important because it continues to be central to Tibetan identity and cultural memory (Bal, Crewe, and Spitzer 1999). This is especially the case when one sees the patterns of debate and historical memory played out consistently online.

Reliably, when online forums such as Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube contain references to Tibet, even without explicit reference to political subjects, it will ignite passionate responses from both pro-Tibetan and Chinese users. For example, Figure 1.3 shows a screenshot from a National Geographic video describing the history of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, Tibet (the past home of the Dalai Lamas and now a museum). Despite the video not mentioning any of the complex and controversial history of the territory and going as far as to stress that the palace is within China's borders, the comments section boasts an aggressive debate between users on Tibetan history and sovereignty.

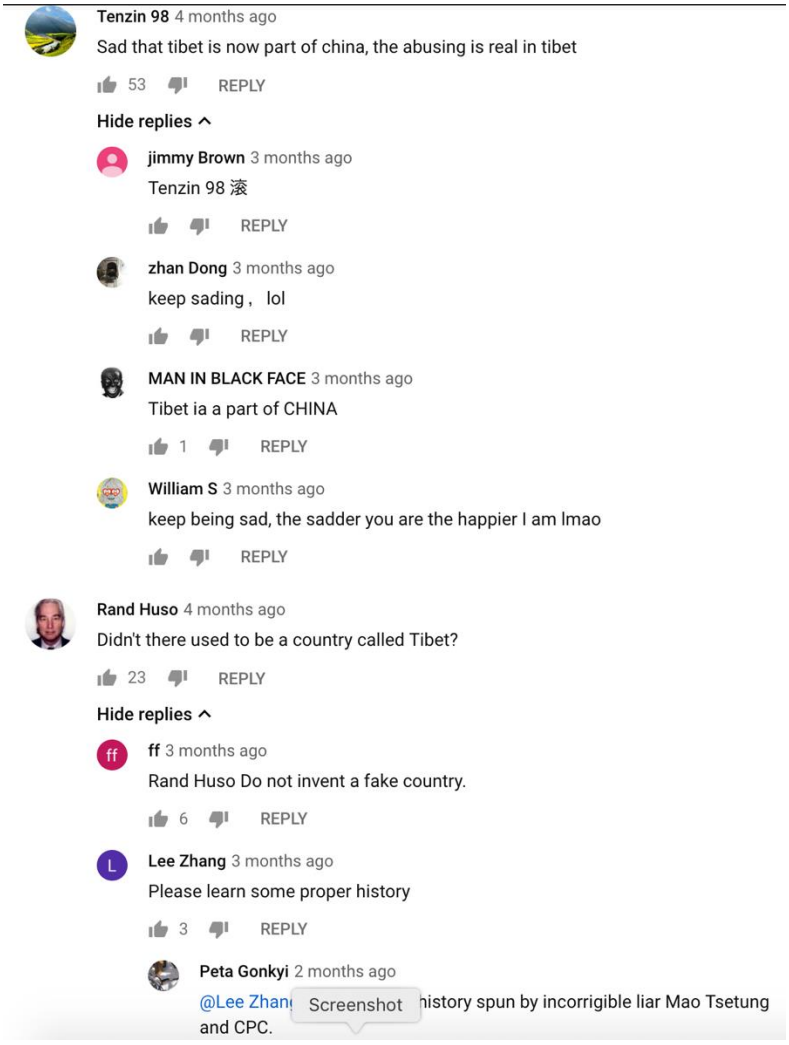

Figure 1.3

It should be noted that I do not generalize all Tibetan or Chinese viewpoints. There are myriad differences in the viewpoints of each group; rather, I am pointing to two general patterns in the debate surrounding the "Tibet question" (Goldstein 1997).

Issues of history and political sovereignty will be referenced where necessary in this text, but this does not make up the bulk of my analysis. As stated, this is not a history; however, Tibetans and the debates around Tibetan activism are, perhaps more than other groups, deeply connected to the recent past and therefore their stories and their lives deal with history.

Transnationalism and Diaspora

A distinction should be made between 'international' politics and processes that are 'transnational'. Vertovec (2009) argued that "inter-national" is a term suited for the "to-ing and fro-ing" between nation-states, such as goods and travel, but "trans-national" should be reserved for those processes occurring between actors and institutions across borders. This distinction is important to this research as it clarifies the essence of transnationality being the linkages and spaces in between states and across borders. The case of Roy Jones and Marriott Hotels is not one of international policy between states, but rather the leaking of complex geopolitical and historical processes into and between non-state actors.

As early as 1969, scholars began to question the definition of an ethnic group. Frederick Barth (1969) critiqued contemporary analyses of the culture concept and ethnic groups by arguing that they are distinguished by boundaries set and maintained by their members, rather than by borders or geography. Indeed, beginning with scholars such as Nina Glick-Schiller (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1994) and Ulf Hannerz (1996), the idea of nation as a bounded entity became too restricting for the social sciences. Rather, scholars moved past this notion of methodological nationalism and into the idea of deterritorialization in the globalized

world (Appadurai 1996; Wimmer and Schiller 2002). In the deterritorialized/globalized world, the concept of the nation-state no longer served as the defining characteristic of cultures, trade, or ideas. Appadurai (1996) examines this unboundedness through his "-scapes" concept. This framework fits nicely into this research, as I am concerned with the global connections of the Tibetan diaspora, especially in the form of "technoscapes" which, in this case, is doubly complex in the form of WeChat, a Chinese made mobile app used by Tibetans to foster connections in diaspora as well as with those within Tibet.

Diaspora is a related, but necessarily different concept than transnationalism, though some scholars (intentionally or not) tend to use the term synonymously. A transnational corporation like Google is not diasporic, for example. Traditionally, diaspora is conceptualized by the dispersal of ethnic communities outside of common *geographic* place of origin. However, scholars such as Brian Axel (2002, 2004) argue that this analytic model for diaspora studies is limited and ineffective. Instead, he argues diasporic communities tend to be united more so by forms of "violence" in their shared history, thus forming the "diasporic imaginary" (Axel 2002). This is an important distinction and changes how one studies diaspora in general. Cross referencing it with other diaspora scholars proves its effectiveness. For example, Victoria Bernal (2017) echoes the importance of a shared memory of violence or harm in her work with the Eritrean diaspora. These studies do not discount the importance of a shared geographic homeland to those in diaspora, but merely suggest that it is not the most prominent concept in which such examples form shared communities.

The Tibetan diaspora exemplifies this. While the geographic homeland of Tibet is important to Tibetans in diaspora, the events of the 1950s and subsequent continuing human rights abuses and violence (here being both physical and structural) is what truly rallies the

community. This is especially true for individuals further removed from Tibet proper, such as those born and raised outside of Tibet.

Finally, Nina Glick-Schiller (2005) offered a critique of previous transnational studies that I wish to adhere to. First, not all diaspora groups or transnational citizens are monolithic groups and "even long-distance nationalists who identify with a nation-state building project in an ancestral homeland usually live within a social field that includes multiple social networks that are not ethnically based," (442-443). One could argue that this is an obvious critique, but it relates more to the misguided use of the diaspora as the only unit of analysis. Second, and perhaps most importantly for this study, she states that "There is a tendency in Transnational Studies to treat all nation-states as if they were equal and sovereign actors within a global terrain," (443). The imbalance of power and the role of imperialism necessary in understanding this study are covered through a review of political economic theory.

Political Economy and Transnational Hegemony

Historical, political, and economic factors govern how state and non-state actors interact and coexist. Embodied history is present in all cultural, political and economic transactions, meaning nothing exists in a vacuum (Haraway 1988; Wolf 1982).

Critical to my political economic examination of topics herein would be the framework of historical examination used by Ong (1999) who argues, in response to Sherry Ortner's use of "modern practice theory" that an approach to political economy which disconnects it from the everyday human agency of non-state actors is flawed and we should rather "analyze people's everyday actions as a form of cultural politics embedded in specific power contexts," (5). Thus my study is concerned with the everyday actions and effects of technology embedded within larger systems of power.

Critiques of neoliberal capitalism, imperialism, and the nature of segmented classes are critical to political economic theory and will be considered among my critiques of Chinese transnational hegemony and imperial power, which is bolstered by its increasing political and economic successes. Marxist and Gramscian theory are important in this regard.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony has been further defined by Mouffe (1979) as "a complete fusion of economic, political, intellectual and moral objectives which will be brought about by one fundamental group and groups allied to it *through the intermediary of ideology*…[and is] able to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own by means of ideological struggle," (181, emphasis original). This feeds into critiques of imperialism, a concept defined by Said (1993) as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory," (9). I would argue, in agreement with other Tibet scholars (Norbu 1987; Smith Jr. 1997, 2008, 2010; Shakya 1999; Powers 2004; Harris 2014; McGranahan 2018) that such a definition applies to the Tibetan plateau region as well as those the state attempts to influence in diaspora.

Such imperial power and transnational hegemony is derived from the concept of "global governmentality" put forth by Ferguson and Gupta (2002), itself an extension of Gramsci's "cultural hegemony" and Foucault's (1991) concept of how states influence the conduct of citizens. The term "transnational hegemony" has been developed and expanded by William I. Robinson (2005, 2007, 2012, Robinson and Barrera 2012, 2015, 2018), who argues that the term denotes a particular form of hegemony in the global capitalist system, wherein specific social groups extend their influence through state apparatuses (such as the Chinese Communist Party). Importantly here, he has used the concept to critique to proliferation of state hegemony transnationally via a global capitalist elite and emergence of digital surveillance and subversion

methods (Robinson 2018). In this way, I analyze how state entities, such as the Chinese Communist Party, attempt to influence the conduct of those institutions and individuals (such as American activist groups and hotel employees) conventionally seen as outside their sphere of influence and how this becomes infinitely more effective through digital means. Also, I seek to understand how Tibetan activists and individuals deal with this Chinese state hegemony outside of China and if their use of technology such as WeChat, Twitter, or Facebook is counter hegemonic.

Given that these forms of technology to be studied are intensely connected to transnational corporations and politics (Bartley 2018), I am interested in how issues such as state censorship and governmentality affect global populations. For example, Castells (2007) examines various issues of power and counter-power in what he terms "the network society." He is not necessarily referencing technology in this term, but it fits the subject well in that these technologies, such as Google and Facebook, are networked in a larger world system and create genuine consequences based on their internal use policies and implementation by users. Shoshana Zuboff (2019) examines this new age of "surveillance capitalism" in her recent landmark text on the subject, wherein she examines the tangible political and economic consequences of surveillance technologies. In chapter 3, I will spend some time discussing the issues related to global social media such as Facebook, WeChat, and the controversy surrounding Google's "Project Dragonfly", a controversial project which would create a search engine, powered by Google, and censored to the specification of the Chinese state.

In addition to corporations, transnational geopolitics and the work of NGOs will also be examined. As some scholars have examined in the context of other nation-states, (Baker-Cristales 2008; Schuller 2012; Bernal and Grewal 2014) NGOs often engage in quasi if not *de*

facto government or state level operations. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) is an example, among others, of such a phenomenon, as it attempts to fill the gaps for Tibetan exiles where their host countries fail them. For example, the CTA provides "green book" to act as a passport and a symbolic form of sovereignty to Tibetans living in exile. In addition, it seeks its own form of transnational governmentality in order to preserve "Tibetan-ness".

Agency and Digital Anthropology

This research is a continuation of a rich lineage of recent work in the subfield of digital anthropology. Beginning with the work of pioneering authors in other fields such as Sherry Turkle (1995), anthropologists turned to the internet and digital technology as ethnographic subjects (Miller and Slater 2000). The amount of research in the field since Daniel Miller's founding papers (2003a, 2003b) and Boellstorff's monumental *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008) has exploded. Specifically, Daniel Miller has since examined Facebook in depth his work *Tales from Facebook* (2011) is relevant to this research.

One defining concept at the heart of digital anthropology is the distinction, or lack thereof, between digital/online practices and our physical reality. Originally defined as disparate spheres of being, digital anthropologists (with few holdouts) agrees that such distinctions are limited and ineffective. The digital is just as consequential, and at times more so, than physical actions, depending on circumstance.

In the case of diaspora studies, two anthropologists have contributed defining texts on digital technology and diaspora; however, as with other cases in digital anthropology, a scholar of media contributed the first. Katerina Diamandaki published her examination of what she called "virtual diasporas" in 2003 and marked the earliest examination of the subject. From there, anthropologists like Jennifer Brinkerhoff (2009) and Victoria Bernal (2014) published

examinations of the digital side of their respective diasporic cultures of study. The latter of these two specifically examined the role of the state in transnational social fields (to use terms by Schiller (2005) and Bourdieu (1977)). What all of these scholarly works examine is the agency of diasporic participants in their transnational communities and how digital technologies make the maintenance of nation and community easier.

Digital agency will be an important continuing concern throughout this text. I am interested in the everyday forms of resistance (Scott 1985) often overlooked in larger studies. There are subtle ways in which Tibetans navigate digital waters that escape or resist censorship such as through YouTube videos (Warner 2013) and blogging (Kehoe 2015). Tibetan activist groups, as well as activist groups in general, will often use social media to spread information about their cause. Though we are well past the time when the "Free Tibet" movement was its fever pitch and the issue recedes further into obscurity, these groups remain active and adapt to changing technology and even adapt their cause to new geopolitical realities. These "freedom technologists", as John Postill (2014) calls them, use technology to their advantage and point to its importance in everyday activities.

My interest in such freedom technologists and technologies lies in the agency of the individual to resist the discursive practice of the state. Specifically, the agency of those at the margins of the state (or the stateless) is interesting, considering that some Tibetan exiles will literally refuse the acknowledgement of the state, such as India, because it would undermine their claim to sovereignty as a community (McGranahan 2018).

In addition to the use of technology for agency's sake, I am also interested in the ways in which Tibetans express identity and community through digital media. Faye Ginsburg (2002) examined the use of media in indigenous or marginalized cultures and suggested that "when

other forms are no longer effective, indigenous media offers a possible means---social, cultural, and political---for reproducing and transforming cultural identity among people who have experienced massive political, geographic, and economic disruption (217). And her prediction proved correct not only for indigenous forms of media, but for many cultures of displaced or marginalized status that use such technology to "mediate culture".

While technologies such as social media, VPN services, and encrypted messaging applications aid in such things as human agency, resistance, and general convenience, there are confounding factors and consequences of the same technologies that crack the image of a digital utopia. Firstly, as I have pointed out above, the Internet is a technology equally at the disposal of state level authorities, allowing them easier access to the everyday life of the individual. This ranges from accessing shopping lists and stored information on devices to the location and audio of you and your surroundings. As such, they can be dangerous for those outside of the ruling class or its allies.

In 2018 alone, Facebook came under fire twice for two separate scandals. The most prescient was the platform allowing hate speech to be disseminated on its site by users in Myanmar which, according to UN investigators, was partly responsible for efforts of ethnic cleansing brought about both by the Myanmar state and the majority Buddhist population against the Rohingya Muslim minority in 2017 (Stecklow 2018). Outside of social media technologies, some scholars have pointed out that there is great bias in search engine results that reinforce our own cultural norms and hegemonic processes (Zuckerman 2013; Noble 2018), while others like Ramesh Srinivasan (2017) explicitly identify the imperial nature of the internet, given that access to such technology is limited in the "developing" world. Understanding how we are limited by

technology is equally important to knowing how we can use that technology for applied/activist purposes and that is one of the larger aims of this research.

Methods

This research was conducted through qualitative research methods common to ethnography. Within this broad category, my methods can be divided into two, those taking place in a physical and digital environment. Preference for data collection was given to digital methods for two reasons. First, my location and funding limited my ability to recruit participants in person. More than that, however, was that physical Tibetan refugee communities are scattered and limited within the Midwest. The second reason for the digital focus is that the project deals with Tibetan activist communities online. Therefore, traditional physical ethnography pales in effectiveness compared to what I could glean from online interactions.

Traditional Ethnographic Method

I employed traditional ethnographic methods for my study of physical environments. For recruitment, I engaged in participant observation in Tibetan religious and activist sites. For these, I attended events at the Tibetan Mongolian Buddhist Cultural Center in Bloomington, IN and, primarily, the Tibetan Alliance of Chicago. I also spoke with activists within Indianapolis, IN at two events when they were present for public engagement, and meeting with 5-10 individuals per occasion. At these sites, I would introduce myself and network in order to find more participants for my study. Participants for this part of the research were semi-limited[1] to second and third generation Tibetan migrants between the ages of 18-35, irrespective of gender. The reasoning behind this is that I wanted to see how digital technologies affected diaspora

[1] I did not exclude willing participants if they were above the age restriction. None of my semi-formal interviews were outside the age restriction.

maintenance for individuals generations removed from a shared homeland. I wanted to discern if this made digital connections in diaspora more or less important. When I found a willing participant, I would invite them to an interview either in person or through an online service such as Skype. I interviewed three participants in this way. First, a 42 year old man named Tashi, who was born in India and moved to the US in the 1990s. The following two interviewees were both in their early twenties and were female. Pema was born and raised in India and has only lived in the US for a very short time. Pasang, by contrast, was born and raised in Boston. Their differences highlighted as much of interest as their similarities. These interviews were semi-formal in nature and all followed the same initial script of questions with varying follow-up questions as I found necessary (Bernard 2011).

At the conclusion of these interviews as well as more informal meetings, I would provide participants with my business card and request that they spread the word about my study to other possible participants. Morgan (2008) identifies this method as "snowball sampling" and involves finding initial participants who can then refer the researcher to other participants. This was a promising method for my study as I was not already embedded within the Tibetan refugee community, but yielded little participants for one reason or another. In at least one of these instances, potential participants were not eager to speak with me due to the controversial nature of the research study. Weaknesses in this method generally are identified through initial participants having too much authority in the sampling. This, however, was partially rectified through a diverse range of initial, disconnected informants.

Each interview's audio was recorded with permission from participants in order for me to transcribe at a later date. This allowed me to focus on the interview and probe for more thorough

discussion and ask important follow-up questions. In addition, I was able to record specific times in my field notes so that I could remember details from that moment in the recording.

An important final note for my physical methods deals with the limited population sampled in the study. Given that the Tibetan refugee community in the Midwest is small, I have taken extra care in avoiding identifying characteristics in my writing. All participants are given pseudonyms. In order to further mitigate the possibility of identification, I reference the age and sex of the individual being referenced, but not what city I spoke to them in. The exception to this is in the case of Chicago, which I felt was large and important enough that I rarely identify when a participant references the city. This cautious treatment of identities is expected by ethical researchers, of course, but becomes doubly important based on the nature of my research. For example, some participants were concerned that loved ones within China may be negatively affected if Chinese officials discovered that they participated. Some would not agree to participate specifically because I was dealing with Chinese authority and the internet.

Digital Ethnographic Method

Digital ethnography has been examined and outlined by a number of scholars in the past two decades. Some describe the methods of digital ethnography as a transplant of traditional ethnography to the digital environment (Kozinets 2015) or the application of anthropological methods to studies involving digital technology (Pink et al. 2016). Many describe an entirely digital approach that finds the ethnographer embedded in online communities without ever necessarily meeting the physical counterparts (Boellstorf 2008; Nardi 2010; Boellstorf et al. 2012).

As a whole, this research falls somewhere along the middle of the spectrum. The bulk of my data comes from online interactions such as comments on online forums, but it is not limited

to this environment, as noted above. All such data is gathered from sources that are publicly available and require no explicit informed consent for inclusion. Any comment or post that requires a password or membership to access was not included in this study. These arenas of discourse provide a large area for data collection and can show a spectrum of participation within the Tibetan community online.

Miller and Slater (2000) were one of the first to examine the internet as an ethnographic subject and break apart the myth, if doubters still remain, that the digital and physical realms are separate realities. The example of Roy Jones alone evidences this. However, in addition to studying digital environments, I also wish to understand how Tibetan refugee community members embody technology in their everyday lives. This approach, specifically, is examined by Dourish (Dourish 2001; Dourish and Bell 2011) and Pink et al. (2016), who examine the ubiquitous nature of digital technology and provide a framework for examining the subtle ways it changes everyday life. For this research, my interviews specifically target how Tibetan community members embody digital technology such as social media. In this, I am less concerned with the devices as I am with applications and the discourses within them.

Data Analysis

Transcribed data was analyzed through an inductive text analysis (Bernard 2011). My data and conclusions are drawn from my observations in the field and in interviews, meaning my conclusions are based on what my data lead me to, not based on my preconceived notions. As themes became apparent, I would highlight and make note of certain repetitions and draw my conclusions from there. As for data gathered on digital platforms, this too was inductively analyzed for emerging themes. Specifically, however, I searched these comments for evidence of

certain patterns of participation within activist communities and their engagement with political topics.

Limitations and Final Notes

Some limiting factors in my research methods should be noted here. First, I am an English speaking researcher working with Tibetan and Chinese speaking populations. I have limited my selection of research participants to those who spoke English. In one instance, I did translate internet comments from a YouTube video (examined in Chapter 2) using Google Translate and checked the work through a Chinese speaking friend. Criticism of this approach is understandable and I even sympathize. I only relied on that method for one set of comments due to their importance in the setting I was analyzing. Past that, all data handled was originated in English.

Next, I must note the limitations of my funding and time in completing this project. Travel funding was not viable for this research and I therefore relied on proximity in participant recruitment and observation. Tibetans tend to gather in communities in which they were resettled after fleeing the Chinese state. According to a Central Tibetan Administration CTA survey, released in 2009, the majority of the Tibetan exile community lives in the Himalayan region (India, Nepal, and Bhutan). The survey labelled almost the remaining 18,920 surveyed individuals as living "elsewhere".[2] This "elsewhere" contains large populations of Tibetans in Switzerland (the first Western state to accept Tibetan refugees), France, Sweden, and England. North America maintains significant populations in Toronto, New York, Boston, Chicago, and, to a lesser extent, Louisville and Indianapolis. My location of central Indiana is not poorly suited

[2] https://web.archive.org/web/20110927215516/http://www.hindustantimes.com/127935-Tibetans-living-outside-Tibet-Tibetan-survey/Article1-634405.aspx

for this research, but it was not ideal either. I travelled to meet with individuals up to four hours away and even then, few agreed to sit down with me for interviews.

The bulk of my data, therefore, had to be gathered remotely. This suits the research topic, as I am primarily concerned with online activities; however, it is a limitation which must be noted. Moreover, several of the social media groups in which Tibetan youth participate are private and therefore are unethical to include in this research data. Therefore, I rely on that data which is publically available.

Finally, some readers might note a critical tone of Chinese perspectives and a lack of focus on Chinese participants as a whole. In part, the lack of Chinese perspective is due to a constraint on the focus of this project as comparing both perspectives would add far too much to the scope. Therefore, I focus primarily on the Tibetan perspective, which I argue is crucial in Chapter 2. That being said, I do not ignore the Chinese perspective and examine instances of conflict often from both sides for a more complex understanding of both.

Chapter 2: Historical Narrative and the Politics of Memory

Introduction

The history of Tibet and Tibetans-in-Exile has been intensely documented elsewhere (I will cover this below, but for good introductions to the subject see: Norbu 1987; Goldstein 1997; Shakya 1999; van Schaik 2011). Instead, this chapter focuses on the *use* of history and memory and draws distinctions between the two terms. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze how collective cultural and historical memory as well as politics shapes the historical narrative regarding Tibet. More broadly, the chapter focuses on reviewing how cultural memory and historical narrative affect present cultural identity and expression among Tibetan refugees and how these processes both shape and are shaped by modern political considerations.

In that vein, there are a number of questions that require addressing. What does the debate and construction of historical narrative mean for Tibetans in diaspora and the politics of memory? How have both Tibetans and non-Tibetans contributed to the media narrative in the West and how were those stories transmitted? Perhaps most importantly, this chapter seeks to examine how Tibetans living in the West, specifically North America, use history and memory to contextualize their own identities and goals, leading all the way up into the present digital age.

History and the Politics of Memory

Trouillot (1995) argued that the historical narrative is constructed by those whose power dictated the "truth". History is written by the victors. In his view, the constructivist approach to history is to view history as "one fiction among others," (6). His argument that history is a "bundle of silences" which privilege the memory of some subjects (people, events, narratives) and encourages the forgetting of others. This is how history, or rather, memory, is constructed in

the narratives of various groups. This process has become known as the "politics of memory".[3] For this chapter, it is important to examine the subject of historical narrative, social memory, and power as it pertains to ethnohistory and Tibetans in diaspora.

It is good to begin with a distinction between the terms "history", or historical narrative, and "memory". Maurice Halbwach was one of the first to deal with the concept of social memory and defined it as "a social reality, transmitted and sustained through the conscious efforts and institutions groups," (Yerushalmi 1982, xv: cited in Climo and Cattell 2002). Climo and Cattell (2002) expanded on his definitions of social memory by arguing that "collective or social memories are shaped by social, economic, and political circumstances; by beliefs and values; by opposition and resistance," and also that they are deeply connected to "issues of authenticity, identity, and power," (4). Therefore the discussion of the subject of memory and historical narrative are integral to cultural studies in any case, but especially when dealing with communities such as Tibetans in North America, whose cultural, political, and economic prosperity hinge on the telling of history and what is considered "truth".

One particular silence was noted by Philip Marfleet (2007) to be that of forced migrants or refugees. He begins his article by specifically quoting Trouillot (1995) in that "history is the fruit of power," (136). Marfleet is interested in the politics of memory as it is connected to the nation-state and the globalized world and engages in a review of the history of the concept of the refugee. Pointing to a debate between scholars on whether the concept of the refugee began with the nation-state or has been a fact of life since time immemorial, Marfleet notes that contemporary examinations of refugee studies have been particularly ahistorical, as if the

[3] The scholarship on this subject is enormous and the term's origin is ambiguous and widely used without credit to a single scholar; however, it tends to be agreed that the beginnings of such discussions occur around the subject of post-WWII Germany and how German citizens remembered the Nazi era.

conflicts or circumstances leading to forced migration sprung up like flashes in a pan. This is a mistake, he argues, as "denial of refugee histories is part of the process of denying refugee realities," (137). In essence, the concept of the refugee cannot be ahistorical as it erases or delegitimizes the lived experience and memory of refugee groups.

This is immediately important when reviewing the case of Tibetans in exile, whom, since 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled into exile, have captured the attention of both civilian and academic minds regarding what has come to be known as "the Tibetan sovereignty debate" or the "Tibet Question" (Goldstein 1997). This debate surrounding the legitimacy of the Tibetan state has spawned a large amount of historical arguments and historiography, to the point where significant texts comparing the varying perspectives on the issue have been undertaken (Powers 2004). Where Marfleet fits into this is in the necessity of such historical undertakings, but with particular attention paid to how Tibetans use history in their own social memory.

Carole McGranahan (2005, 2010) tackles this exact issue in her examinations of history and the Tibetan diaspora. She argues that "for Tibetans in exile, history is caught between what 'really happened' and the epistemic murk of historical memory," (2005, 570). She too cites Trouillot's concept of the "bundle of silences" and extends it by noting how marginalized groups may also choose to withhold certain parts of their histories for political or strategic advantage. She calls these forms of histories "arrested". They are not erased, as they may be reserved for some possible future in which they might be advantageous to recall. Alternatively, these arrested histories may also be withheld in order to safeguard the community from perceived danger.

More importantly, McGranahan's article examines the importance of history in the political struggle of Tibetan resistance. In this way, the politics of memory takes on double

meaning in that the politics of censorship can define historical memory, but also in that memory is inherently political.

All of these arguments lend themselves to larger theories of the politics of memory. In multiple different levels of grouping, historical narrative is constructed and strategically silenced based on systemic power structures. This can range from the way the past is maintained in the present for social groups, the "arresting" of narratives within groups (McGranahan 2005, 2010), or the delegitimization of troublesome political entities by the state (Marfleet 2007). How we understand history and memory are therefore important to how we understand larger political and economic entities such as those on the margins as well as the state. It also provides scholars with some medium between the postmodernist absolutes identified by Trouillot as positivism and constructivism, in that social memory would be the deployment of certain "truths" of the past which are dependent on perspective, and history is that which can be identified with some measure of objectivity.

Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob (1995) recognize that the concept of the historical narrative (as post-modernists see it) and objectivity are overly dichotomized and that there exists room between the extremes for historians to work within. More interesting to me here is their examination of the "meta-narrative" or the way that we talk about and use history.

The Tibet Question

Since 1950 a strong debate has existed within the Western consciousness as well as scholarly canon around the question of Tibetan sovereignty and whether or not China's claim of suzerainty over the region is historically and legally valid.

Tibetans have argued strongly against the claim; however, they were not proactive enough following de facto independence in 1911 to establish themselves as *de jure* independent

(Goldstein 1997; HH the Dalai Lama 1962). Since then, Tibetans have tried to frame their struggle as one of human rights in the region and have shifted from a goal of independence and sovereignty to one of genuine autonomy while respecting Chinese suzerainty.

Tibetans in the west vary as any group does, but typically, they hold that Tibet was independent prior to 1950. And they *were* by all accounts *de facto* independent following the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 (Goldstein 1997; Norbu 1987; Smith Jr. 1996, 2008; Shakya 1999; van Shaik 2011). In addition, they argue that historical facts used to discredit this claim are more complex than Chinese sources would suggest. The non-profit organization "Free Tibet" even dedicates a page of their website to disproving what they identify as six key arguments China uses to claim authority in Tibet (these can be found here: https://www.freetibet.org/about/china-argument).

Of these arguments, there is one that I find of particular note and will examine here. Chinese sources argue that Tibet was a theocratic serfdom before their PLA military forces "liberated" the region in 1950. Further, Chinese sources claim that under the feudal serfdom conditions, 95% of the Tibetan population was oppressed by barbarism. Tibetans deny this as being the case and the testimony from those with experience in old Tibet reported no such extreme cases. That being said, sources like Heinrich Harrer (1954) and Dawa Norbu (1987) both report that forced labor did occur and some evidence does suggest that harsh punishments were enacted on offending citizens (such as cutting off limbs and eye gouging).

Modern Tibetans do not keep this in their memory; rather, they negotiate what is relevant in the current era. For example, Pasang noted in an oral interview that individuals with ties to the elite class in historic Tibet would condemn such practices. In her words:

> I think there's an unspoken thing where lots of Tibetans, especially in exile, have been exposed to many of the young people. They know that just because Tibet went through a

> lot of bad things, that doesn't mean Tibet was a perfect Shangri la before, you know, people acknowledge that there were problems… So I know from like from word of mouth there is even like, there is still some animosity actually even to this day, even amongst Tibetans of my generation where they feel that there was an aristocratic caste of Tibetans that basically exploited the rest of the population and indirectly led to the loss of our country and our homeland basically. So, although they blame, the main blame is always on the Chinese I think because obviously they're the ones who perpetrated this like this whole oppression of Tibet. There is like a soft level, like a little kind of like side feeling of like anger towards those other Tibetans who exploited their own people. I think if Tibet was a free country there would be a day of reckoning where people would say this political system needs to change. You know what I mean?

She went on to note that Tibetans who are descended from the aristocracy and are of her age group have told her that they are fiercely proud of their heritage, but would condemn their ancestors if the atrocities the Chinese accuse them of were true. These forms of negotiating memory are what Mieke Bal (1999) might call an act of "cultural memory", in that it is performed at an individual and social level in ways that one may or may not be conscious of (vii). In this case, younger Tibetans are keenly aware of their cultural memory and even negotiate what they choose to embody within their own identities. This is important for how these negotiations and arguments play out in cyberspace, but first, I must expand on how historical narrative is used *against* Tibetans.

The Serf

Figure 2.1 shows a *very* common image to be found in Chinese cyberspace. I first came across the image in November of 2018 and have been shocked by how often I see it across the internet. A quick Google search for "Tibetan serf" shows it as the first result. Often, I have seen this image posted in forums and, most recently, in an article on WeChat responding to the term "Free Tibet". Regardless of its medium, the image is always deployed to represent the same thing: the unflinching cruelty of Tibetan serfdom prior to Chinese liberation in 1950. It is often

used in the same context as images of body mutilations and other such punishments said to have been enacted upon the Tibetan populace.

Figure 2.1

I searched extensively for any metadata I could find that would help me to identify the subject of the image, but I found none. The image never comes with an accompanying citation nor any reference to where it was taken, by whom, or even when. All the information the reader receives from the poster is that it is an image of a Tibetan serf prior to 1950 and this is important because it fits into the Chinese state narrative that Tibet was a barbarous wasteland before being liberated. Notice the man's gaunt, haggard features, his tattered clothes, and especially the chains around his neck and hands. Perhaps the reason this image is widely circulated online is due to how very well this image supports the Chinese historical narrative. There is even a holiday for it in the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China called "Serf Emancipation Day" that commemorates March 28, 1959 when China officially denounced the Dalai Lama and his government. Every year, Chinese cyberspace is filled with such images that remind readers of China's moral authority in the region.

This in itself is an act of memory rather than historical narrative, because the author of the post using the above image is attributing importance to the image. They are making the claim that it proves their cultural memory correct, despite its dubious nature as a primary source.

Serfdom Contested

Tibetans do not outright reject the narrative perpetuated by the Chinese sources, but they do contest them. Recall Pasang's quote above and how she notes that the system of Old Tibet was dated and would very likely have been overthrown eventually had Tibet been allowed to progress independently. However, this acknowledgement is a very small part of what makes their contested history so interesting.

If we understand China as an imperial force in the Tibetan region, the narrative and cultural memory produced by Tibetans in diaspora forms what Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) called "counter storytelling". Counter storytelling occurs when the story or narrative of a marginalized group is told or exposed where it might otherwise be suppressed or ignored. Tibetans online tell their side of the story and subvert the ideas of history perpetuated by the state. Thanks to cyberspace, this even works transnationally and demonstrates agency on the part of the Tibetan netizen.[4] In a most interesting conference paper presented by Séagh Kehoe in 2017, the use of "old photos" online as a form of counter-storytelling which underwrites the "Serf Emancipation Day" narrative is examined in depth. He notes that some users will share images of Qing Dynasty China and Han Chinese as a counter to the images of Tibetans and will

[4] The term netizen refers to any habitual user of the internet. Commonly within digital scholarship, it is used to denote users who actively engage in online communities or work to make the internet a more open and social resource.

post arguments such as “Old China: One billion serfs” and “Have the Han serfs been liberated yet?”[5]

Since 1959, Tibetans have noted their loss and decried the continual threats to their culture (the Dalai Lama chief among them). Pasang noted this earlier when she referred to the loss of the Tibetan homeland. She also noted that “every Tibetan born in exile is born an activist”, quoting another young Tibetan. This phrase specifically is important to how Tibetans engage with history in cyberspace. Often they will open with a reference to a lost homeland (see Axel 2002, 2004) and follow with how this cultural recollection of loss affects them and draws similarities to indigenous communities experiencing persistent structural harm due to settler colonialism. This is poignantly illustrated in three ways. First, Tibetans in diaspora grapple with a loss of homeland and a suppression of their history which actively disenfranchises them from their family, their connection to important physical places such as spiritual sites and cities, and their cultural heritage. Secondly, the very nature of diaspora is to be dispersed within communities in which one is “othered”. My participants noted that only one community in Toronto, which they affectionately called “Little Tibet”, made them feel particularly welcomed due to a notable concentration of Tibetans which allowed for one to walk down the street “and see nothing but Tibetan faces” as Pasang told me. Finally, the hegemonic authority of Chinese imperialism tends to find its way into the everyday lives of Tibetans no matter where they live.

In fact, much of the narrative focusing on Tibet since 1959 has been, from perspective of Tibetans and Westerners, a humanitarian crisis. I analyzed over 100 article samples from the *New York Times* between the years 1959 and 2015 in order to discern the dominant patterns in Western news media surrounding the purposefully broad term “Tibet”. I used a number of digital

[5] https://seaghkehoe.com/2017/09/08/imagining-the-past-old-photo-sharing-among-tibetan-netizens-in-chinese-cyberspace/

tools such as Voyant and Palladio to code the data. Figures 2.2 and 2.3 show the results of my data.

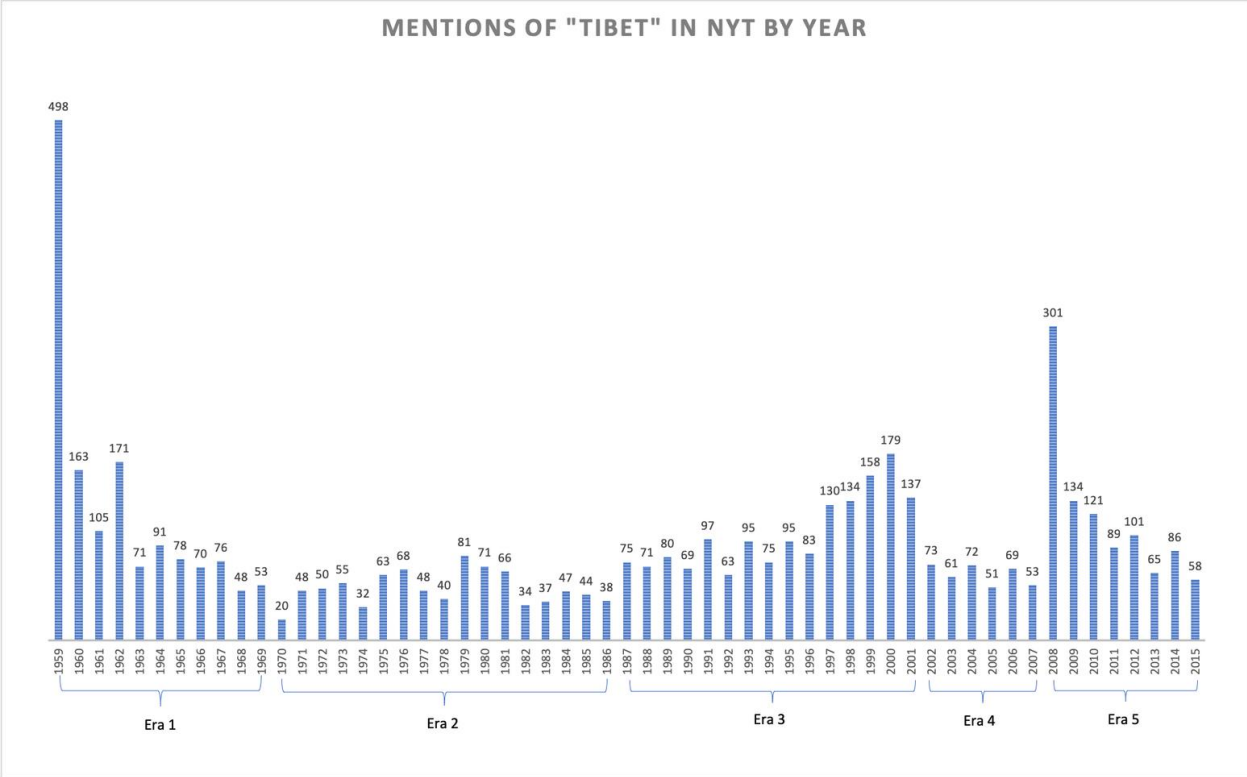

Figure 2.2: This image tabulates the data regarding mentions of Tibet by year. I have divided them into "Eras" based on both crests in the data and relevant historical markers.

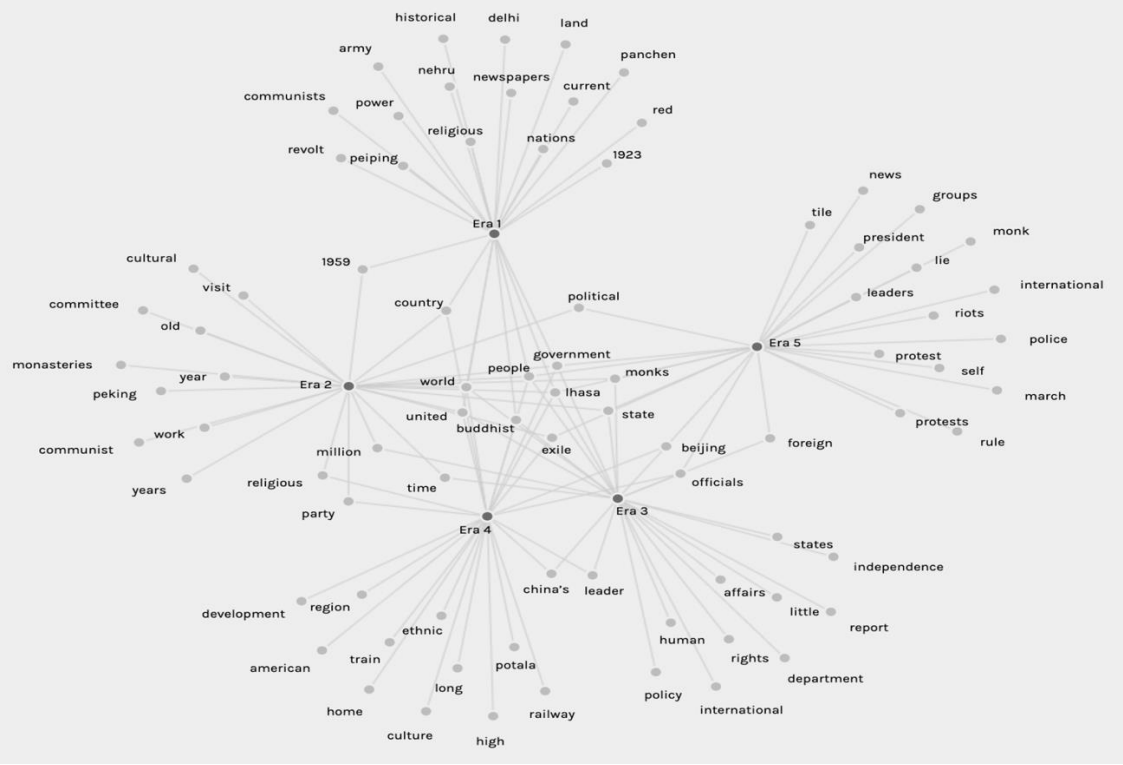

Figure 2.3: This image is a Palladio network visualization of all of the eras. Terms that go outward are specific to the Era Node and those connecting in the center are common to two or more. In short, terms appearing in the center are common to all eras and terms to the sides are specific to certain ones. This identifies patterns in historical dialogues centering on Tibet (at least in the *New York Times*).

Two eras are of particular importance here. First, in Era 1 (1959-1969), I noted a pattern of general anxiety in the tone of the articles regarding communist expansion in the region. Articles referenced terms such as the "Red Army", "Red Chinese", and the "Communist Threat", which is indicative of the "Red Scare" mentality in the United States at the time. Little regard was paid to the Tibetan people and Chinese control of the region was generally discussed to be strategic. The map image in Figure 2.4 comes from one such article (“Tibet---ABC of a Remote Land” 1959) and demonstrates this rather clearly.

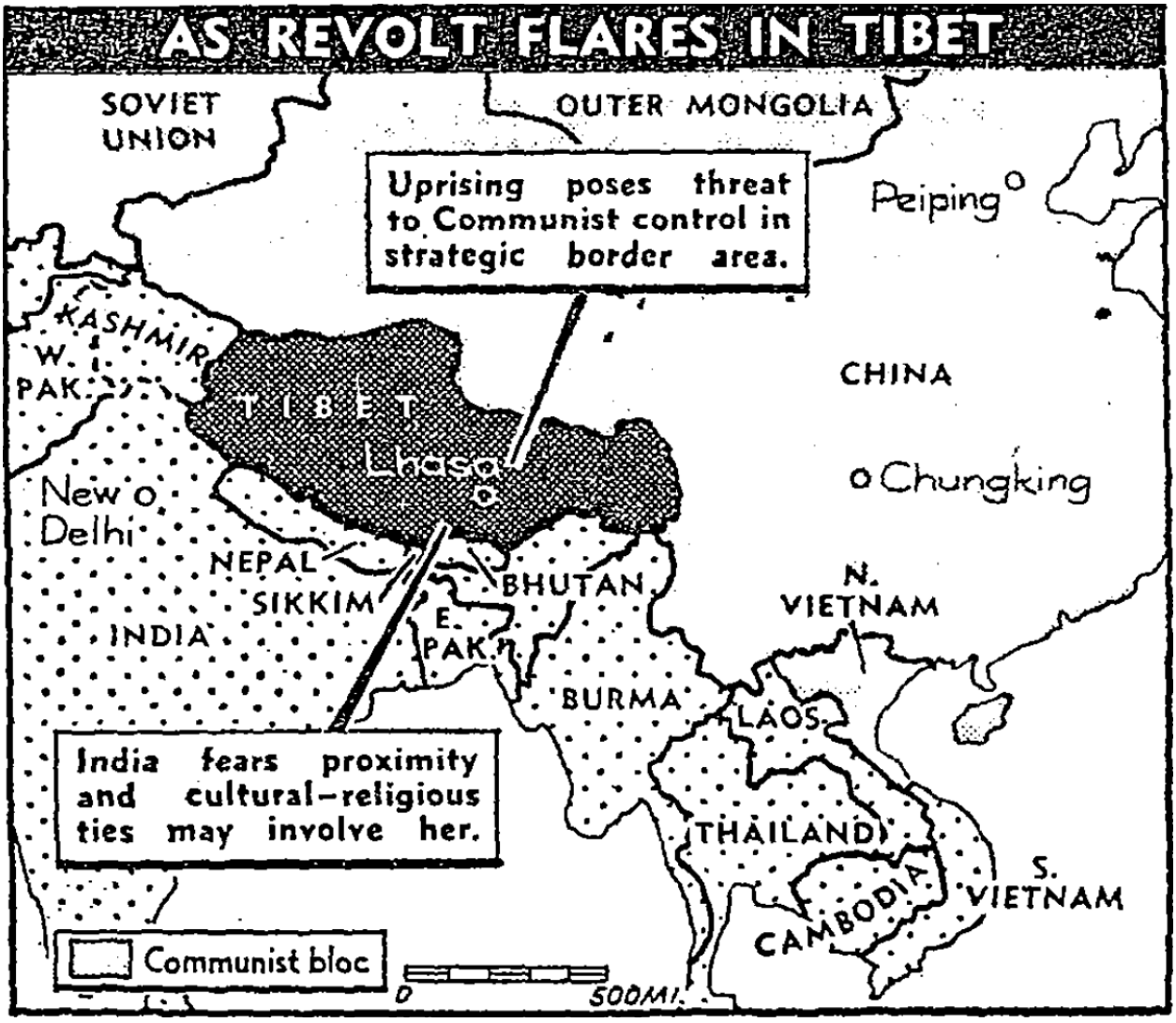

Figure 2.4

At the time, Tibetans had not yet been dispersed across the globe as refugees and contributed little to the narrative in Western spheres of consciousness. This changes significantly in the following eras, when keywords such as “culture”, “people”, and (especially) “human rights” begin to take center stage. Figure 2.5 is a still image of a Voyant Cirrus data visualization that shows the results of Era 3 (1987-2001). I find this era particularly interesting, as the term “human-rights” shows up as significantly as the Dalai Lama’s name. Tibetans had much more visibility in the West at this point and the “Free Tibet” movement was at its peak. The Dalai Lama has risen to celebrity status in the West (much to China’s consternation) and Tibetan

memoirs and histories were being published for English speaking audiences (HH Dalai Lama 1962; Gyatso 1997; Norbu 1986; Shakya 1999).

Figure 2.5

The Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace prize in 1989 and several Tibetan non-profits begin at this time. Notably, one of the more active groups as of this writing was founded in this Era. "Students for a Free Tibet" began as a charter-based organization to support the Tibetan Independence movement in 1994 in New York City. They rose in prominence thanks in part to their proliferation through American and Canadian university campuses at the height of the "Free Tibet" and also through their connection with the popular "Tibetan Freedom Concerts" held in the latter half of the 90s. These events featured Tibetan speakers and activists and proceeds went to Tibetan activist organizations (Strauss 1996; van Gelder 1998).

Memory and Identity Online

The below images were taken from a Tibetan meme-group (to be examined further in later chapters). In these images, the difference between historical narrative and memory is made

plain using Tibetan-posted images. Figure 2.6 demonstrates the irritation Tibetans feel when they try to explain their history to outsiders. Specifically, when their narratives are rejected or the underlying importance of the historical context they are trying to convey is ignored, it causes them significant irritation. One user in the above image notes: "bruh I spent like ~10 minutes tryin to explain to my chinese friend the whole tibet thing and at the end she just said "…so ur southwestern chinese." bitch I threw HANDS." This colloquial expression "threw hands" typically means that an attack was attempted or launched, but in the context of the post, it is being used as hyperbole to express her dissatisfaction with her friend's assessment of her as merely "Southwestern Chinese".

Figure 2.6

Figure 2.7

To Tibetans, such erasure is a common complaint and it provides some motivation to the development of the "counter narrative" (Tuhui-Smith 2012) against Chinese imperial power, which, in place of settler colonialism, engages in the same systemic and persistent suppression of Tibetan stories and histories. In addition, the assessment and labeling of Tibetans as Chinese first and Tibetan second is viewed as an insult because it "silences" their historical perspective. In fact, many Chinese netizens view the Tibetan counter-narrative as specifically fictitious. This demonstrates all three factors of what Trouillot (1995) described as history as social process. He

argued that individuals are involved in this process at once as "1) agents, or occupants of structural positions; 2) as actors in constant interface with a context; and 3) as subjects, that is, as voices aware of their own vocality," (23). In the above example, users are aware of their vocality and contribute to the historical process through creating texts such as these memes and discussing them in forums. They share their frustrations and reinforce their own historical narratives.

Now, examining the second image (Figure 2.7) evidences something different, but related to historical narrative and the social process of history. This image is striking to me for a number of reasons, but chief among them is that it is a humorous take on a profound issue for those living in diaspora. First, consider the concept of Tibet's existence. It exists as geography, yes, but currently as a part of China. Maps will sometimes leave mention of Tibet off entirely in exchange for either the Chinese term for the region (Xizang, which means Western Tsang) as the CIA did in 1979 (Figure 2.8) or not reference provinces at all and label China as a whole on political maps, which reflect the political reality (Figure 2.9).

Second, and more importantly, the meme (Figure 2.7) feeds into shared Tibetan diasporic identity as being internalized ("in the heart") as well as anxieties tend to revolve around the assimilation of unique Tibetan culture into that of the Chinese majority. This is common among many indigenous and diasporic groups, but can be more pronounced in this case due to antagonistic feelings stemming from those who are pro-assimilation. For example, a common comment I find on forums come from users who write things like "Tibet does not exist" or "stop making up countries". When challenged, they tend to respond "learn history".

Figure 2.8: Image credit: CIA 1979

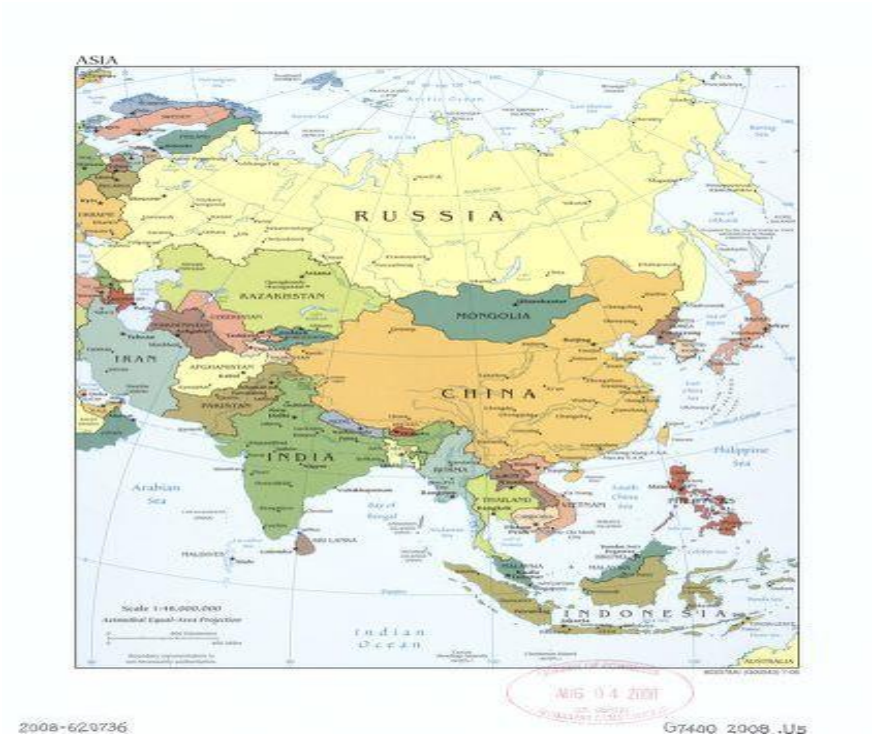

Figure 2.9: Image credit CIA 2008

An example of one of these such exchanges is found in Figure 2.10, where a, presumably, Chinese user antagonizes others over a National Geographic video showcasing the Potala Palace on YouTube, even though the video makes no specific point about Tibetan sovereignty and specifically notes the region as a part of China.

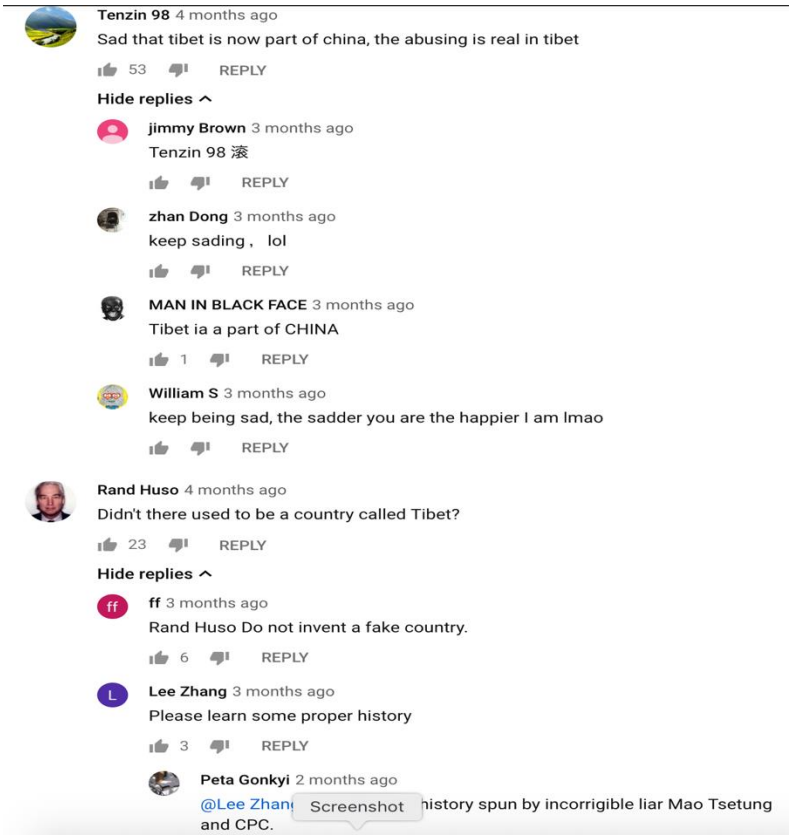

Figure 2.10

Other examples exist within cyberspace. For example, returning to the example of YouTube comments, a user uploaded a video in September 2018 specifically asking "Is Tibet a Country?"[6] The purpose of the channel is to educate viewers on geography, one of many such niched subject channels. In this video, he explains to the viewer the history of the Tibetan Empire, but does not touch on the "Tibet Question". Rather, he examines the semantics of what a

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLmAfySHWRc

"country" is, arguing that it meets the definition in some regards, but is firmly within the government of China. Commenters seem to have taken issue with the question itself, providing sarcastic responses to the video. These are shown in Figures 2.11 and 2.12.

Figure 2.11

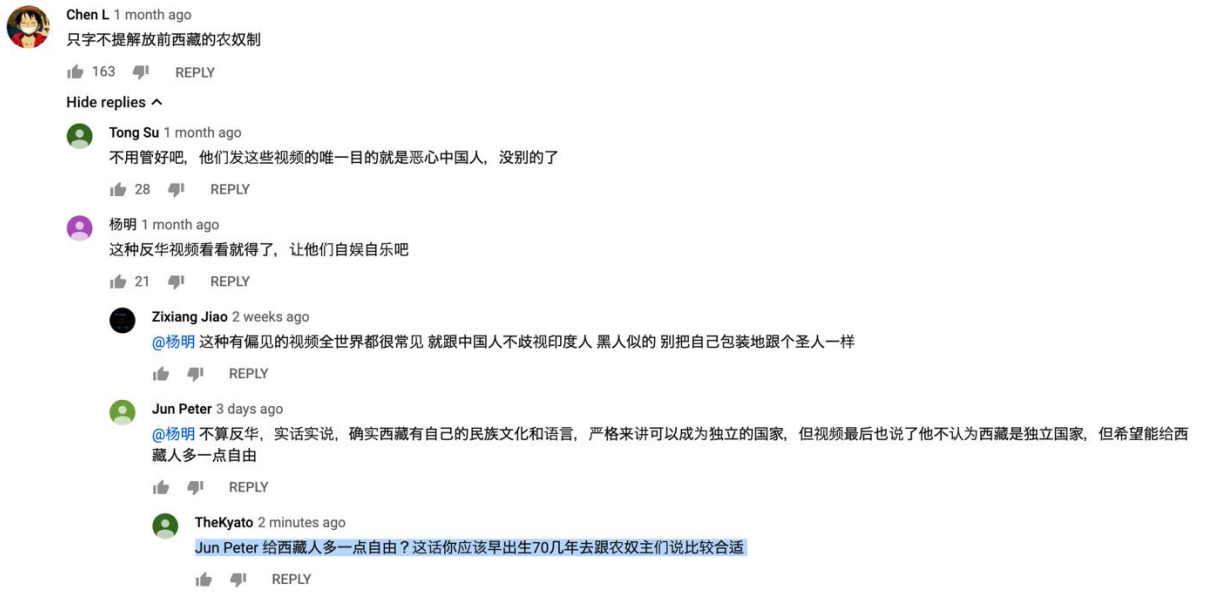

Figure 2.12

English speaking readers will note that in the first of these images (Figure 2.11), the commenters are mocking the video's topic and arguing that Tibet is but another example of "conquest" and should be accepted. This is also a common narrative lodged at Native Americans and other indigenous people. Essentially, these comments argue, that cultures and people who were dispossessed of their land and sovereignty are simply consequences of being the "losing" side. In this, they represent the positivist perspective of history and evidence what Trouillot (1995) said about that perspective: "At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won," (5).

Figure 2.12 shows a different perspective, those of Chinese users. Here, user Chen L notes that "This doesn't mention the serfdom of Tibet before liberation."[7] The following two users reply that these videos are only meant to irritate the Chinese audience and are of little consequence. User Jun Peter provides an interesting response:

> @杨明 is not anti-China. To be honest, it is true that Tibet has its own national culture and language. Strictly speaking, it can become an independent country. But the video finally said that he does not think that Tibet is an independent country, but hopes to give Tibetans a little more freedom.

This text exchange goes on for a while longer, with most Chinese-speaking users arguing against Jun, stating that "if you think this, maybe you should have been born a serf 70 years ago," (this is actually the highlighted text in Figure 2.12).

In this kind of historical narrative, Tibetans consistently have their heritage demonized and minimized. Therefore, scattered from their homeland with many now never having seen it, Tibet exists within their heritage and their own cultural memories. They recognize, as noted

[7] This image was translated in three ways. First, I put the sentences into Google Translate and checked a Chinese-English dictionary for further accuracy. To check my work, I asked a friend (from China) to check my work. This is the only moment in my research that required translation. It should rightly be noted that I do not speak Chinese fluently and that my translations rely on outside resources.

herein, the less glamorous aspects of their histories, but more than anything are connected through shared cultural memory. Tibet is in their hearts, so to speak (Figure 2.6).

Brian Axel (2002, 2004) has proposed that those in diaspora are connected more by remembered violence than by a geographic homeland and I concur. In this case, their dispossession unites them as much as their shared history and they perform and engage with acts of cultural memory (Bal, Crewe, Spitzer 1999) constantly whether that be in the form of internet memes or arguments about identity.

Conclusion: The "Use" of History and the Politics of Memory

With the help of Western activists and institutions, including several resolutions passed by Congress, Tibetans in exile communities in both physical and digital environments examined herein have made great strides in crafting their own counter-narratives (Tuhiwai-Smith 2012) to China's imperial historical narrative. Tibetan counter-narratives online show how individuals in diasporic communities negotiate and defend their perspectives in challenging environments. It also demonstrates how they craft their own online spaces where they can share in similar acts of memory and cultural recall. They can bond over the struggles of having to defend their histories and their stories against those who would erase, denigrate, or minimize them.

What makes the digital age more interesting to this discussion of the politics of memory is that it provides new challenges to traditional historical narrative. While conspiracy and false information are rampant, the internet has provided marginalized groups with an arena in which to negotiate their history and social memory. Moreover, the politics of memory become more complex given the globalizing effect the internet brings about. It is a double-edged sword which will present issues throughout this thesis. Homi Bhaba (2004) wrote that the location of culture can be found in the texts we create and how these texts are deployed and negotiated. In the case

of Tibetans in diaspora, the texts they create, disseminate, and debate, especially historical ones, are integral to their political, economic, and cultural survival. Therefore, understanding the politics of social memory and its implications for historical narrative is integral to the subjects discussed hereafter. As will be seen throughout this thesis, the common themes of loss, retribution, and intergenerational conflict are heavily integrated into modern Tibetan struggles in both personal and political arenas.

Chapter 3: Digital Technologies, Ethnolinguistics, and Transnational Connection

Several media technologies make it possible for transnational groups to connect with one another. Each of my participants were asked how often they use social media. Younger participants reported using digital media technologies between 15-20 hours per week. When asked to what extent those hours were devoted to specifically Tibetan related activities (articles, pages, discussions), all participants reported that this easily made up 2/3 of that time. This chapter provides background on the various technologies Tibetan-Americans in my study use on a daily basis. Based on participant responses and from information observed online, I have identified the applications they use and have ordered them here by importance.

WeChat

By far participants noted WeChat as the dominant application in use by Tibetans around the world. In fact, WeChat is such a ubiquitous feature of Chinese, Tibetan, and Bhutanese lives that it has become a sort of "one app fits all" technology. Pema went as far as to state that where Americans might ask for one's phone number when asking another person on a date, a Tibetan would ask for their WeChat ID. WeChat functions as an instant messaging service, a social media network, a news app, and even a mobile game platform. It rivals Facebook in its ubiquity and its multipurpose design.

Facebook was banned in China in 2009 after discovering that Uygur activists in Xinjiang were using the platform for communication.[8] This, coupled with the conflict between the Chinese state and Google in the early 2000s taught a valuable lesson: the state needed to be in control of media technology within the country.

[8] http://en.people.cn/90001/90776/90882/6697993.html

Accordingly, when WeChat was developed in 2010 by Tencent Holdings Unlimited (a multinational technology conglomerate based in China and intimately connected with the Chinese state) it had to comply with Chinese state censorship laws. Last year, the application boasted over 1 billion monthly active users worldwide (Hollander 2018).[9]

Use of WeChat is controversial within the Tibetan community. Most Tibetan individuals living in diaspora will use the app, as it has become so ubiquitous among Tibetan users both inside and outside of China, but how readily they "trust" or approve of its use varies. There is a prevalent understanding among users that their actions within the app are being monitored and therefore, they avoid certain activities. For example, the use of the Dalai Lama's image in any regard is avoided due to the possible consequences it can bring to users within China. For example, CitizenLab of the University of Toronto has reported repeatedly on censorship on the app (Ruan, Knockel, and Crete-Nishihata 2017[10]; Crete-Nishihata et al. 2018[11]; Knockel, Ruan, Crete-Nishihata, Deibert 2018[12]; Kenyon 2018[13]; Ruan, Knockel, Ng, and Crete-Nishihata 2018[14]; Ruan, Dalek, and Knockel 2019[15]). and the Tibetan Action Institute (TAI), an NGO based in New York meant to provide technology advice to Tibetans across the globe, recommends against its use. Pema told me about a number of her friends who had to be careful not to mention or reference the Dalai Lama, whose image is illegal in China, with their family as it could lead to their prosecution within the state. This is a concern among many users, as they identify the primary use of WeChat as a way to connect with family.

[9] https://www.businessinsider.com/wechat-has-hit-1-billion-monthly-active-users-2018-3
[10] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/04/we-cant-chat-709-crackdown-discussions-blocked-on-weibo-and-wechat/
[11] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/07/analyzing-censorship-of-the-death-of-liu-xiaobo-on-wechat-and-weibo/
[12] https://citizenlab.ca/2018/08/cant-picture-this-an-analysis-of-image-filtering-on-wechat-moments/
[13] https://citizenlab.ca/2018/08/how-wechat-filters-images-for-one-billion-users/
[14] https://citizenlab.ca/2016/11/wechat-china-censorship-one-app-two-systems/
[15] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/11/managing-message-censorship-19th-national-communist-party-congress-wechat/

Tashi stated that, for him, WeChat was a "family thing," primarily being used as an instant messaging service that connects family across distance, but also among closer relatives. He described the ubiquity of the app as an alternative to more common (in the West) SMS services. Questions like "how are you", "how was your day", and "dinner at 6" are among the things listed as messages commonly sent through the app. Indeed, WeChat is the primary method in which those in diaspora stay in contact with those still in China.

Some Tibetans question why a Chinese developed and monitored app would be used by Tibetans in such personal ways. Pema's thoughts are interesting on this. In one of my interviews, she said:

> P: I don't know. I'm kind of skeptical about it, because there's a lot of tapping of communication. It's controlled by the Chinese. They tap on almost everything and I really do not understand why Tibetans inside of Tibet would use that app. So, with me, I have asked my family to switch to What's App even though I know that there is no such risk for ME, because I have no relatives, I have no families inside of Tibet. But I have a friend here. I won't name her. She, her entire family is inside of Tibet. And then, she still, they still use WeChat to contact each other. She'll call them, talk to them and I will be like "Why do you use that if you know that it has a very sensitive…uh…
> J: Surveillance?
> P: Yeah!

Pema joins many Tibetans in criticizing the use of WeChat in their daily communications; however, she also notes that many Tibetans are reluctant to give up using the app as well. She continues shortly after the previous quote with:

> I use WeChat even now. My parents are still adamant. They wouldn't switch to What'sApp. They are still using WeChat. I contact them through WeChat. My family, my relatives. But, with my younger generation, we would use messenger, Instagram, SnapChat. That would be more…but no even youngsters would use WeChat.

Here she begins to hint that younger Tibetans would stray from WeChat, especially if their relatives inside Tibet were not using it. She stops herself, however, and reconsiders this position. This is when she told me that WeChat has become ubiquitous within the Tibetan community (in

multiple regions). Pema was born in India and is a part of a larger community reliant on WeChat for communication around the Tibetan Plateau. When I spoke with a younger Tibetan individual born and raised in the US and with minimal ties to the Tibetan homeland, Pasang, use of WeChat was rejected outright. She explained her reasoning:

> "for me personally, WeChat, it's too much of a risk. I know there are individuals who choose to use WeChat with self-censorship for the protection of those who they communicate with and that's, I definitely think it's okay. It's just not something that I personally do."

Pasang was concerned with issues of surveillance by the Chinese state and had been warned by specific Tibetan organizations, such as the Tibet Action Institute, to avoid communicating through WeChat with individuals who could come to harm.

Tashi also identified the concerns of his fellow Tibetans with regards to WeChat; however, he counters Pema and Pasang's criticism of using the app.

> I am actually coming from the other side and saying we must use it. I think we must…most of them are used to sort of inform China and they are not at all willing to listen to us. So now through this kind of app, they are secretly listening to us and for me now we have this chance, we have the ear of the Chinese government. So we need to talk and we need to do as much as we can to spread His Holiness's message to those inside of Tibet. Unless it is a threat to your family members. Which inside of Tibet, they can't, but for us we can do that.

Tashi's argument demonstrates a form of agency on the part of Tibetan technology users. For him, he believes the importance lies in the discursive spaces these technologies create and therefore outweighs the surveillance and transnational hegemonic authority. I would not argue that these acts of resistance are counter-hegemonic, but I believe they demonstrate an interesting strategy for cultural preservation and unity in diaspora which is not as easily accomplished without said technologies. The concept of using social media and other technology in exercising agency is more thoroughly examined in Chapter 5.

WhatsApp

Participants identified WhatsApp as the second most popular application used in their daily lives. WhatsApp was founded in 2009 by two former Yahoo employees. It was designed as an instant messaging service before other services such as Messenger and WeChat were developed. In 2014, it became a subsidiary of Facebook. Along with Facebook and Instagram, the application is banned within China. Unlike other applications banned within the country, WhatsApp was not targeted due to use by activists or for the sharing of illegal content, but due to a tightening of Chinese cyber-security laws in 2017 (Mozur 2017).[16]

Interestingly, before this ban, WhatsApp added end-to-end encryption to all forms of messaging within their app (Metz 2016).[17] What this means is that data is encrypted in a way that the only person who can read that data is the recipient. No third party, even hackers, conceivably, could access messages sent through the service. This coincided with a large news story within the United States following the San Bernardino terrorist attack. The FBI demanded that Apple unlock the iPhone belonging to one of the terrorists. Apple refused, arguing that this was a breach of privacy, and set off a debate regarding privacy in the digital era (Issa 2016).[18] A federal judge ruled that Apple was not required to unlock the device and that ended the matter.

Left out of that conversation, however, were the ongoing developments to the surveillance state within China. The ethical issues being brought to the surface in the above case had long been reality in China by that time. Therefore, when WhatsApp introduced more secure encryption software, despite not having clear evidence of illegal use within the country, it was no longer possible for the application to fall under regulations of the state.

[16] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/18/technology/whatsapp-facebook-china-internet.html
[17] https://www.wired.com/2016/04/forget-apple-vs-fbi-whatsapp-just-switched-encryption-billion-people/
[18] https://www.wired.com/2016/02/forcing-apple-hack-iphone-sets-dangerous-precedent/

Even with such security measures in place, WhatsApp users can still fall prey to Chinese authority. In 2018, Zhang Guanghong, a Chinese citizen, sent a message to a WhatsApp group consisting of individuals both outside and within China. The message was critical of Chinese president Xi Jinping. He was later detained within China and presented with printouts of the messages he sent (Mozur 2018).[19] As explained, end-to-end encryption prevents any third party from accessing data; therefore, it is highly likely that Guanghong was reported by a user in the recipient groups.

I use this example to demonstrate not only the ways in which transnational hegemony is not limited by encrypted technology, but to example why Tibetans "switching" habitual use of technology from WeChat to WhatsApp would not necessarily benefit them in terms of avoiding surveillance. This is not a new phenomenon and evidences deeper concerns regarding peer surveillance and the panopticon as Foucault (1977) described it, which involves a system of power which encourages individuals (even those not affiliated with the state specifically) to bear. In the above example, Guanghong would not have been found out and arrested had WhatsApp truly been the panacea others hoped it would be. This is to be examined further in this thesis, but here we see an example of how entrenched such structures of power are and how difficult it is to subvert them.

Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube

Every individual uses different forms of media to the point where one's use becomes as individually curated as their clothes or hobbies. Therefore, it is important to note that Tibetans in exile are not limited to the applications and websites I have chosen to specifically address. For example, much of the activism regarding the Tibetan community exists on Facebook and

[19] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/technology/china-technology-censorship-borders-expansion.html

Twitter, as those are the two primary forms of social media accessible across the globe. Groups such as "Free Tibet" and "Students for a Free Tibet", the latter of which I primarily deal with in this thesis, have an active presence on both sites. Most of the audience of these sites are Western, with commenters primarily being non-Tibetan individuals who support Tibetan causes.

YouTube is particularly interesting for three very different reasons. First, on a larger scale, videos even tangentially related to Tibet will spark historical debate within the comments section of the respective video. This is most enlightening when one sees the dueling perspectives of both Chinese and Tibetan users[20] play out online.

Secondly, YouTube, alongside Facebook and Twitter, provides Tibetan activist and cultural groups with a channel through which to disseminate information and news. Alongside the long running *Tibetan Review*, there are numerous ways in which Tibetans get their news on the exile community. My participants identified the website of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) as a primary source for news relating to Tibet. Most commonly, I was told that individuals would simply share articles directly from the website rather than sharing them from any one Facebook or Twitter page. No participant identified YouTube as a site they spend much time on. I find this curious. Channels such as TibetTV (the official media arm of the CTA), "RFATibet", and "Voice of Tibet" boast large subscriber counts, but do not regularly reach over 500 views per video. In short, my ethnographic participants did not identify YouTube as a source of news or community, but Tibetan engagement *does* occur.

Third and finally, the site boasts a respectable number of channels devoted to Tibetan culture, primarily music. Tibetan use of music videos has already been the subject of analysis by

[20] I presume ethnicity based on username, language use, and community engagement. Obviously, such presumption is not guaranteed even if the person comments that they identify as a specific ethnicity. This is one of the pitfalls of digital research and requires judicious data collection.

Cameron David Warner (2013) who examined the subtle ways in which Tibetans used music videos to preserve and celebrate their own cultural practices under the nose of the Chinese censors. In part, my examination of Tibetan related content on YouTube is to update and expand on his examination in the context of a transnational techno/mediascape (Appadarai 1996).

Digital Ethnolinguistics

Through my research, one common subject has been emphasized: the relationship between these digital technologies and Tibetan linguistic practices. Language is a large part of the ethnic and national identity of any group, but in the face of marginalization, diaspora, and, in some cases, policies bent on linguistic extermination, language revitalization becomes desperately important (Meek 2010). This undercurrent of linguistic anxiety permeates the Tibetan community both on and offline. In this section, I will elaborate on these anxieties within the Tibetan diasporic community, provide some scholarly context on language revitalization in marginalized communities, and conclude with an explanation as to how digital media technologies help in the revitalization process within the context of the Tibetan diaspora.

Pema described her anxiety to me numerous times by repeating and emphasizing such phrases as "they [Tibetan elders and authority figures] place *a lot* of emphasis on Tibetan language." She also complained of a disconnect between the Tibetan language as it is spoken and as it is written. She stated that "you cannot write what you say and that makes things difficult," and continued "there is like a pressure for young people to speak pure Tibetan and not…not like broken Tibetan. I don't speak pure Tibetan, no way. I am trying but I cannot." She also noted how she was always self-conscious of her own language use, admitting that she would stay silent rather than contribute to conversations in spoken Tibetan. However, she also notes something very interesting as she continues:

> If I were to go to a retreat center in India, I would be told to speak in Tibetan first. So I would have to watch my language. And I would not speak up as much as I [want] and say my thoughts and ideas because I cannot speak good Tibetan. At the retreat center [in New York], they made it very clear, you can use any language you want. We could even speak broken Tibetan. It was kind of inclusive that way. That's why we discussed language. Because we felt that Tibetan language was sort of shifting, like we could create our own form of Tibetan. That was a whole other discussion, but you see how that is more impactful.

Pema demonstrates a few things of importance here. First, she notes the pressure younger Tibetans in diaspora, especially those in Western communities, feel to preserve an "authentic" Tibetan language. It is also interesting that my participants used terms such "pure" and "clean" to denote such language use, as compared to dialects of Tibetan which have grown to include Hindi or Chinese words, which would take on the antithesis of "dirty" or "broken" language. The second issue Pema points to here is the "shifting" nature of the Tibetan language and the freeing feeling she felt after being allowed to speak the language of her choice, even "broken" Tibetan.

Pasang bemoaned the use of such terms and called the view of a "pure Tibetan language" elitist. She described her thoughts as such:

> I would say that trying to preserve anything in stone, like stone is easily shattered. For example, like you want preservation to be malleable, you want it to be adaptable in order for it to actually succeed and be effective.

Pasang mentioned that most Tibetans in exile (she said 95% even) would use the Hindi word *aaloo*, meaning "potato", rather than the traditional Tibetan word for the vegetable. This may seem obvious, as most Tibetan refugees have been funneled through India and cannot help but diffuse some Hindi into their language patterns; however, this is exactly the point Pasang was trying to make in her example: if their language did not bend, it would break.

In her 2010 book *We Are Our Language*, Barbara Meek (2010) shows how endangered language communities bring life back into their heritage through revitalization practices. Of these, she mentions some key factors identified by UNESCO for language vitality. For my

purposes, I only examine a few as they relate to this thesis. They are (in my own order) as follows:

- Amount and Quality of Documentation
- Community Members' Attitudes toward their Own Language
- Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies Including Official Status and Use
- Language Response to New Domains and Media

The advent of digital archives has been a boon to the first factor, amount and quality of documentation. The Buddhist Digital Resource Center boasts over 15,000 high-quality scans of texts dating from Medieval Tibet to the late 20th century, preserving several texts important to Tibetan history and folklore. The "Mandala Project" out of the University of Virginia is another such digital repository of Tibetan, Bhutanese, Nepalese, and Indian cultural texts, with the added contribution of audio, video, and works of art. Certainly these technologies do well to preserve religious and cultural history, but what does it provide to the general Tibetan community?

Pema did identify Tibetan religious history as an important concern with language. She told me:

> And then when you read Tibetan Buddhist scripture, it is written Tibetan language, so if you do not read as much Tibetan, then you do not really understand what is going on in the text as much, right? And if you do not understand, then you do not want to read it, you know? So…. Westerners are coming from all over to study Buddhism in India, but Tibetans are having a problem understanding Buddhism. That's this huge problem and it's because of mainly language.

She identified language acquisition as a sort of key to accessing cultural knowledge (in this case religious) and joked that Westerners travel to learn Buddhism from Tibetans, but Tibetans themselves sometimes have trouble accessing such knowledge. When I pressed her on this subject with one of my follow-up questions regarding "obligation" to participate in such aspects of Tibetan culture, she told me:

> I did feel obligated earlier. If felt like I was being told. It was more of my duty than desire to be able to speak with Tibetans, to be able to learn Buddhism, but now it's more of a desire, coming out of a desire. Because you sort of look at it and you think, you sit down and think about it. But I can say that there are people struggling, like, to fit in that space.

She references the difference between desire and duty identified by Tina Lauer (2015) in her examination of second-generation refugees in Switzerland, an article Pema has read.

This brings me to the second factor listed above: community members' attitudes towards their own language. As might be evident from my above quotations, Tibetans note language as an important part of ethnic identity and cultural preservation. One should make the distinction between the two because, as Lauer (2015) specifically outlined, the demarcations of "Tibetan-ness" is fluid, especially among younger respondents who are more likely to question the strict boundaries of their parents and become more open to individualistic endeavors. As noted by Barth (1969) ethnic boundary markers change over time as they are negotiated by members within the group.

Returning to Pema, who is a veritable well-spring of data on this subject, she explained to me that elders within the Tibetan community will become "defensive" when she would question cultural practices. In addition, she stated that she was similarly criticized for watching Indian television shows and listening to foreign music. In her example, her use of language grew from a duty to which she was obligated to perform to an internalized desire to speak the language and revitalize it. Others might wish to abandon it due to a feeling of ambivalence and lack of perceived reward in learning it. Pasang scoffed at such traditionalist viewpoints. Humorously, she told a story of her time teaching in India. At her school, Tibetan women were required to wear chubas, which can get rather hot in the Indian climate. Pasang opted for a half chuba, one

that breathes better, and was scolded by a member of the CTA for choosing clothing not traditionally authentic. To which her thoughts were:

> Because we live in a different climate now. So we're in exile and in a different climate, so that is just much more appropriate. Unless you want female teachers passing out with dehydration and overheating. Like you need to be able to adapt culture as to where you are. And same thing in exile.

These debates about rigidity or fluidity are fairly consistent in diasporic and indigenous communities dealing with language issues (Eisenlohr 2004; Cook 2004; Meek 2010).

Now, a complicating factor within this conversation is diasporic Tibetan concerns for language policy within Tibet. One of the most salient concerns of Tibetan publications in the past two years dealt with the imprisonment of language education activist Tashi Wangchuk. Wangchuk argued against policies to mandate Mandarin as the official language of schooling and advocated for the preservation of the Tibetan language within China. In 2015, Wangchuk and his cause was featured in a video produced by the *New York Times* and two months later, he was detained in China. In 2018, he was sentenced to five years imprisonment (starting when he was first detained in 2016) (Buckley 2018)[21]. It is actually against Chinese law to limit language use in ethnic minority community, but Wangchuk's crimes still seem to fall beneath the larger umbrella of "separatist actions".

Chinese internal policy consistently works to undermine religious and ethnic diversity. Specifically, religious activities in the western border regions of Tibet and Xinjiang are monitored closely. According to the Human Rights Watch organization, smaller social groupings are curbed through concerns of an "ideological threat" to the nation[22]. Specifically of interest here is the inclusion of a ban on children attending Tibetan religious services in their holiday

[21] https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/world/asia/tibetan-activist-tashi-wangchuk-sentenced.html
[22] https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/30/illegal-organizations/chinas-crackdown-tibetan-social-groups

months. According to the Tibetan Review (2019)[23], this prevents students from attending free language learning lessons from monks and adds another threat to the preservation of Tibetan linguistic practices.

This all works to make the landscape of Tibetan language revitalization difficult, but there are ways in which Tibetans practice individual agency to preserve it. This brings me to the final part of the important factors for language preservation: how language responds to new media. All of my participants designated WeChat and mobile technologies as helpful to language revitalization. Tashi specifically outlined the importance of WeChat in this way:

> …we send texts in Tibetan script. Especially on Wednesday, we call it white Wednesday, which is specifically designated for the preservation of Tibetan culture. So on Wednesdays, all participants must use Tibetan all the time. There are issues with language. For example in Tibet, they sometimes come up with Chinese words and in India, it is Hindi and English. So the languages kind of mix. So we try to keep it clean and that won't happen without things like WeChat.

Again, note the use of "white" and "clean" to denote the rigid use of "pure" Tibetan language use. The "White Wednesday" (*lhakar* in Tibetan and more widely known as "The *Lhakar* Movement") Tashi is referring to here is a part of a larger non-violent resistance movement specific to the Tibetan community. *Lhakar* is a movement dependent on individual participation in non-cooperative acts of discursive resistance. To better illustrate the nature of the movement, the "*lhakar* pledge" is as follows:

- I am Tibetan, from today I will speak pure Tibetan in my family.
- I am Tibetan, from today I will speak pure Tibetan whenever I meet a Tibetan.
- I am Tibetan, from today I will remind myself every day that I am a Tibetan till I die.
- I am Tibetan, from today I will wear only Tibetan traditional dress, chuba, every Wednesday.
- I am Tibetan, from today I will speak only Tibetan every Wednesday.
- I am Tibetan, from today I will learn Tibetan language.
- I am Tibetan, from today I will stop eating meat and only eat a vegetarian diet and gain more merit every Wednesday.

[23] http://www.tibetanreview.net/china-criticized-for-banning-tibetan-children-from-learning-their-own-language/

- I am Tibetan, from today I will only use Tibetan and speak Tibetan when I call or send a message to Tibetans[24]

All of my participants noted WeChat as a technology that aids in the practice of *lhakar*. Numerous times, I was shown how to type in Tibetan script on mobile phone keyboard, itself a freeing technology for Tibetans. The ability to type in their own language is important and the Tibetan (as well as the related Dzongkha) keyboard is native to both Apple and Android products. This is helpful to the preservation of language when such conveniences are included in mobile technologies, but not all services include such access.

Because of the marginal nature of the Tibetan language, digital tutorials and resources have been made available to troubleshoot and promote the use of Tibetan online. A particular site of interest is "Digital Tibetan", which is devoted to keeping track of software in which it is possible to include the use of Tibetan. In Figure 3.1, you can see the "news ticker" in the right side of the page which identifies news related to software support for the language. In this case, the latest news is that a new version of Amazon's Kindle stopped support for the Tibetan script. The same site links to other related sites which focus on other areas of Tibetan tech use, such as the *Buddhist Digital Resource Center*, which is a digital archive of Buddhist as well as cultural texts, with a focus on Tibetan culture. These sites serve an important function of helping to guide localization efforts and cyber activism within the Tibetan community by gathering tools and tutorials which bring the language firmly into the digital age. However, it has to be noted that these sites are written predominantly in English.

The common use of English among the Tibetan community is a matter of convenience as well as strategy. Of course, individuals living in English speaking nations would find it necessary to learn the language, but there is a larger context to this.

[24] Retrieved from https://lhakardiaries.com/about/ February 5, 2019

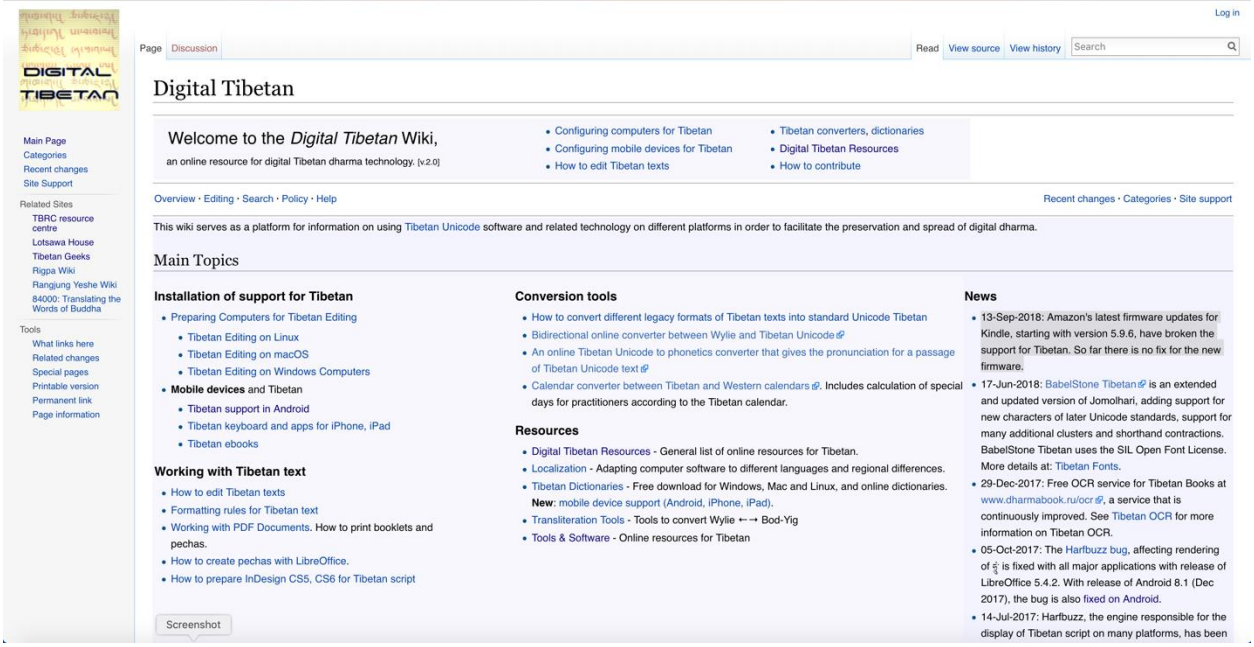

Figure 3.1

In the early days of internet technology (e.g. the 90s), the language of technology and the language of English were synonymous. In addition, the global ubiquity of the English language lent itself to the gathering of allies (whether that be nation-states or individually interested citizens) and the proliferation of the Tibetan cause worldwide.

Tibetans continue to rely on English as the primary language of public activism online. In this case, WeChat offers no respite where Tibetans can engage in public activism in either Tibetan or Chinese, as they would immediately be censored by the Chinese state for subversion. The Citizen Lab of the University of Toronto has conducted several studies on WeChat censorship specifically and has shown that both images and texts can be censored in very short order (as short as 5 seconds) after being uploaded (Ruan, Knockel, and Crete-Nishihata 2017[25]; Crete-Nishihata et al. 2018[26]; Knockel, Ruan, Crete-Nishihata, Deibert 2018[27]; Kenyon 2018[28];

[25] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/04/we-cant-chat-709-crackdown-discussions-blocked-on-weibo-and-wechat/
[26] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/07/analyzing-censorship-of-the-death-of-liu-xiaobo-on-wechat-and-weibo/
[27] https://citizenlab.ca/2018/08/cant-picture-this-an-analysis-of-image-filtering-on-wechat-moments/
[28] https://citizenlab.ca/2018/08/how-wechat-filters-images-for-one-billion-users/

Ruan, Knockel, Ng, and Crete-Nishihata 2018[29]; Ruan, Dalek, and Knockel 2019[30]). Also, in my research on WeChat, I have found that no censorship occurs so long as the article referencing Tibet is supportive of the Chinese position. Figure 3.2 is a screenshot of the beginning of an article written by a Chinese user denouncing a Western animal food company The Honest Kitchen who advertise their food as containing no ingredients from China and support Tibetan independence.

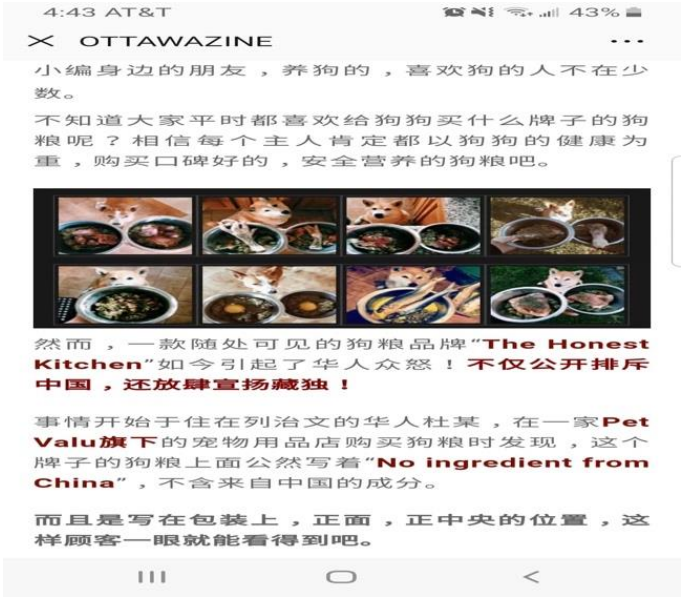

Figure 3.2

Therefore, Tibetan activists rely on Western social media to advertise their events, goals, and information. This leads to an interesting paradigm in which Tibetans are pulled in multiple different linguistic directions, while remaining tied to one's "duty" to contribute to practices of *lhakar* and Tibetan cultural identity.

YouTube As a National Media Platform

TibetTV, RFATibet, and VOATibet are all YouTube channels serving a similar function: they are all Tibetan news media cites. Specifically, TibetTV is the official media arm of the

[29] https://citizenlab.ca/2016/11/wechat-china-censorship-one-app-two-systems/
[30] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/11/managing-message-censorship-19th-national-communist-party-congress-wechat/

Tibetan government-in-exile (CTA). These channels receive very little community engagement. Their statistics generally hover around 80 views per video even weeks after being uploaded. Given that the estimated population of Tibetans outside of China is roughly 130,000 as of 2015[31], this does not seem to me to be particularly cogent in understanding how Tibetans use technology. This would make some amount of sense if you think that Tibetans born in diaspora would not necessarily concern themselves with a land they have never been to, but, in my experience, diasporic Tibetan youth are very concerned with the larger community and the political economy of Tibet. This makes me conclude that they simply get their news elsewhere, for example through the *Tibetan Review* which has a website and social media presence. Similar trends are noted in RFATibet and VOATibet. Compare this to the channels dealing specifically with music and it is a different story.

I examined three YouTube channels with significant subscriber counts which specifically focused on the publication of Tibetan music videos. My thoughts leading to this examination were spurred by Cameron David Warner's (2013) article on what he called "uncivil religion" in Tibetan music videos. He argued that the use of subtle religious, linguistic, and cultural motifs demonstrated a form of resistance to Chinese hegemony in favor of a uniquely Tibetan art form. I was curious to see if this was important to the diaspora community, as the previous study dealt with Tibetans within China.

I analyzed the ten most recent videos from three of the largest channels I could find on YouTube (their names and data in the table below). I chose to analyze based on upload date rather than the most popular (judged by YouTube) because I felt this would provide a more up-

[31] Data available at http://tibetdata.org/projects/population/. The author admits that this report is by no means authoritative, as the CTA (and the nature of diaspora itself) does not efficiently track demographics.

to-date image of the video trends.[32] For each video, I coded for images (unique shots) which demonstrated[33]: landscape, specifically when the landscape or architecture is the main focus of the shot; religious iconography or the use of *thangka*[34] paintings, which are both of religious and cultural importance to Tibetan culture; and ritual or cultural practice. That last category is broad, so, for the purpose of my analysis, I limited it to shots which demonstrated a clear purpose in highlighting cultural activities specific to Tibet. I chose these categories based on the analysis of resistance found in Warner's (2013) article. Each time I encountered a unique shot containing the coded material, I would mark it down and would stop at ten, given that this number would indicate a large portion of the video was devoted to the theme.

Name	**Subscriber Count**	**Upload Count**	**Most Hits**
Kenze85	18,865	362	1,100,000
Tibetan HeartBeat	6,762	944	137,000
Tibetan Music World	20,653	1,358	746,139

Figure 3.3

[32] I can be rightfully criticized for this, as the most popular videos might demonstrate what is clearly of more importance, but I was uncomfortable with two aspects of this. First, the amount of time since the upload would have varied and allowed for a trickle of views that distance them from other more recent videos. Second, disregarding upload date would not tell me anything about habitual use, as my chosen method might.
[33] Coding list: Landscape; iconography; ritual; religious; cultural practice (specific to Tibet).
[34] *Thangka* paintings are traditional works of Tibetan art usually depicting Buddhist religious figures or events on cotton or silk.

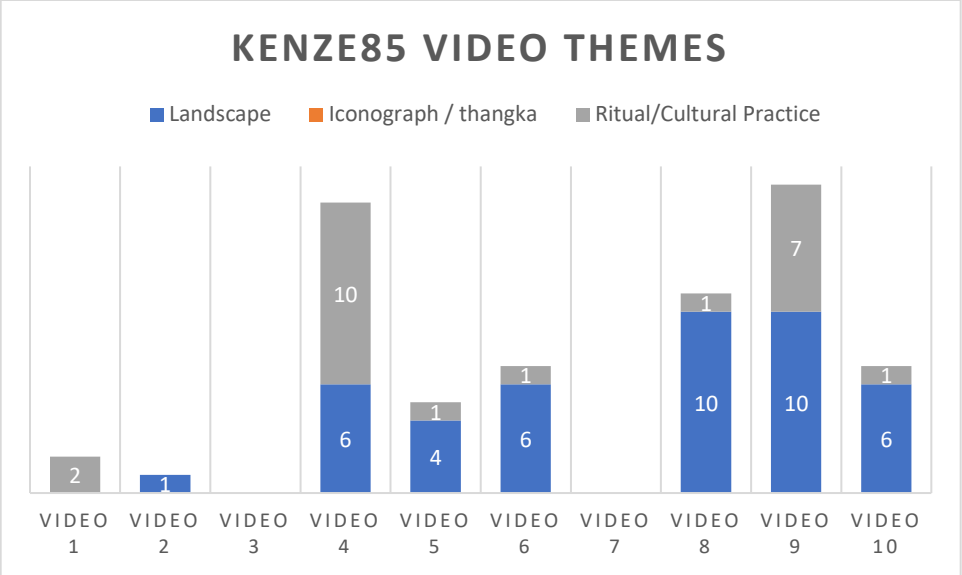

Figure 3.4

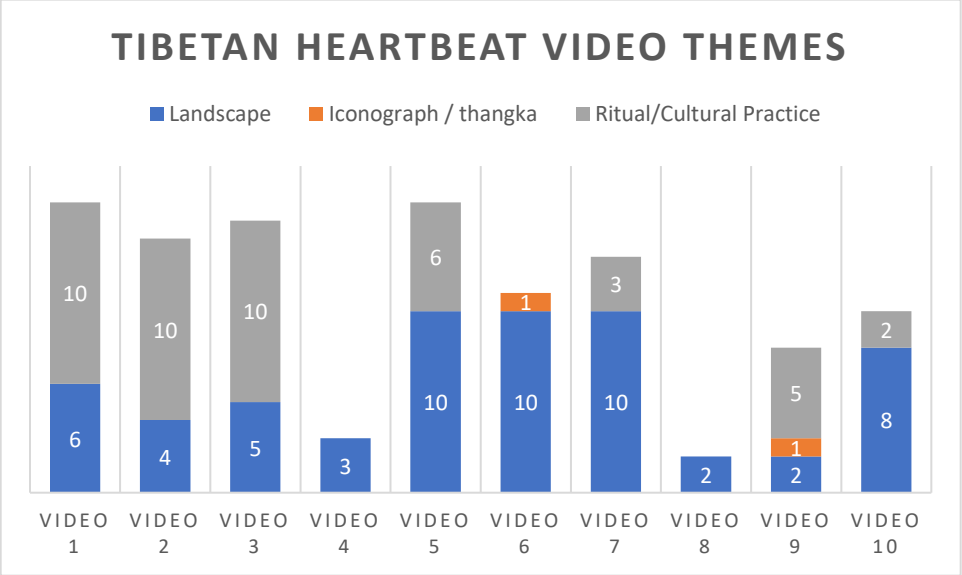

Figure 3.5

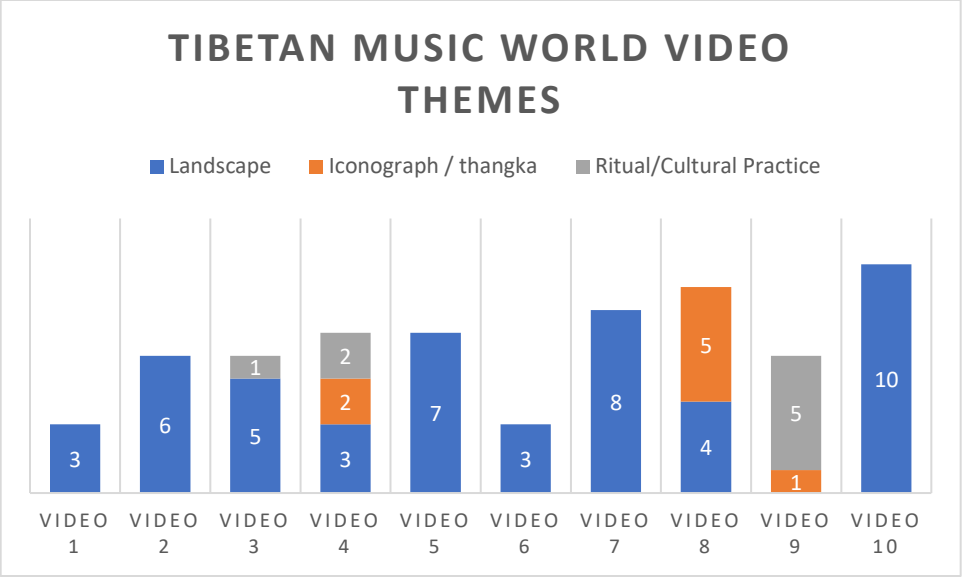

Figure 3.6

Overwhelmingly, the landscape motif made up the largest part of the coded data, followed by ritual or cultural practices such as spinning prayer wheels and circumambulation around stupas and prayer flags. As might be expected from a cultural group dealing with land dispossession, the vast majority of these videos involved the singer in a secluded or isolated dramatic landscape which illustrates the Tibetan sense of love for the landscape and, by extension, their homeland in which they now may feel disassociated from, like guests in their own home. Warner described these videos as containing imagery that hearkened back to a "pure" Tibet of the past, one which was free from Chinese influence. This was demonstrated a number of times when shots specifically featured monks, the Potala Palace in Lhasa, or children in rural villages. Very rarely was a "modern" Tibet the focus. Technology and modern architecture are notably not in focus in these videos. One video[35] by Norbu Samdup (entitled "Nangla Logdro"), though not included in the above sample, requires specific attention.

[35] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Td0VvUIPuE

In this video, the singer wakes in an apartment within a city. From there, the video shows the singer leaving an airport on foot, surrounded by individuals in modern clothing. Briefly, the video shows a time lapse of the Potala Palace at night while cars zoom past on the street below. For the remainder of the video, the singer travels through rural Tibet, performing for groups wearing traditional *chubas* and blessing him with *khatas*, which are ceremonial scarves indicative of Tibetan Buddhism. The video continues with the singer traveling on foot in secluded mountain terrain. He places the *khata* on a rock stupa, ending his visual pilgrimage. He returns to the city in which the video began the video ends with an image of the man sleeping. Was it a dream? Is he resting contentedly after his pilgrimage and connection with the landscape?

What is specifically important about this video is, of course, the connection to the landscape as a metaphor of indigenous pride and identity, but also the purity of rural Tibet and Buddhism. The juxtaposition of modernity and the past is notable in both the shot of the Potala and the singer's happiness upon returning from his pilgrimage to the countryside. These videos demonstrate that the visual themes in Warner's argument are alive and well, but do they matter much to those outside of Tibet?

In short, no. None of my participants identified YouTube as a site on which they spent much time. When I specifically probed for information on YouTube, I usually only received blank stares. Only Pasang mentioned music and, specifically, a 2017 song called "Phur"[36], which she said was interesting as a song that was released by a Tibetan artist from Tibet and became a hit with those in diaspora. Indeed, it is a very popular song within the diasporic community, as it often appears in Tibetan memes like the ones in Figures 3.7 and 3.8. She did not indicate that this

[36] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRGTQaCbbnw

was a common occurrence of any particular importance. Tibetans living outside of the Chinese state are not necessarily inclined to search out specifically Tibetan music for either cultural reinforcement or for a connection to a homeland.

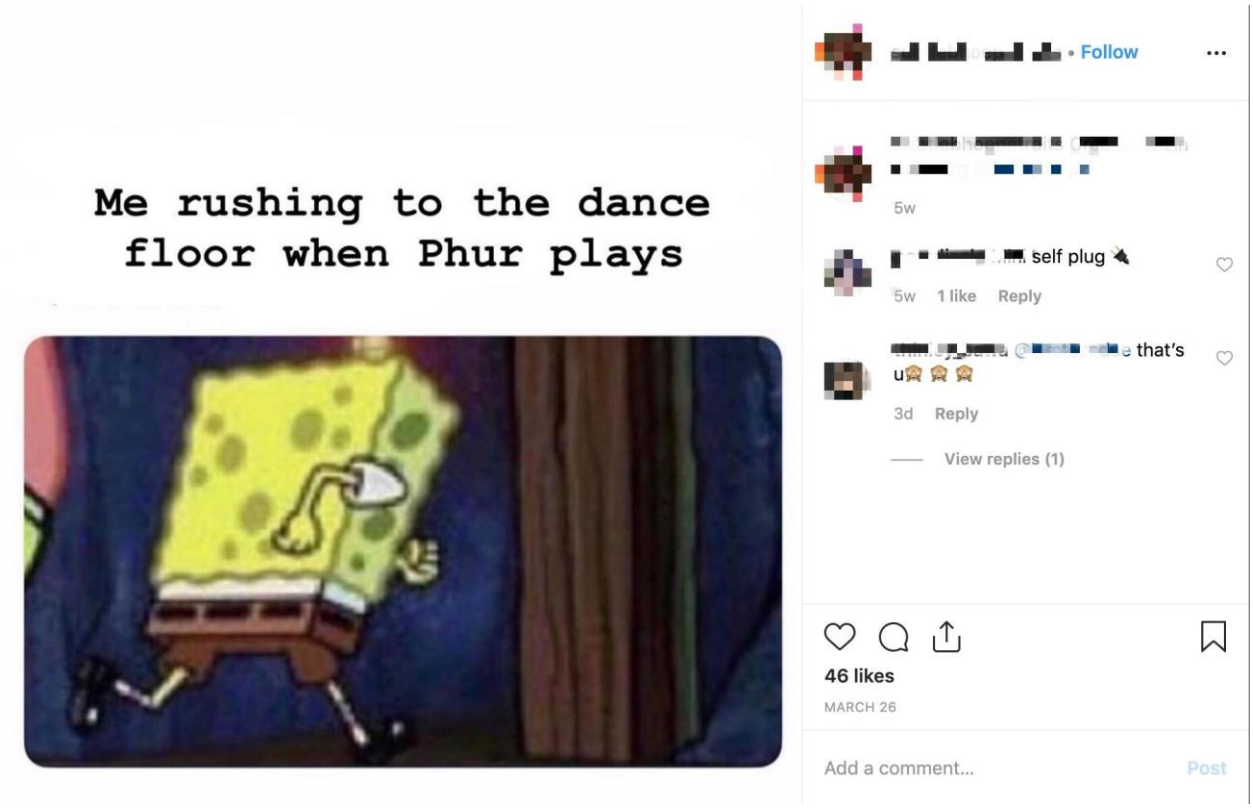

Figure 3.7

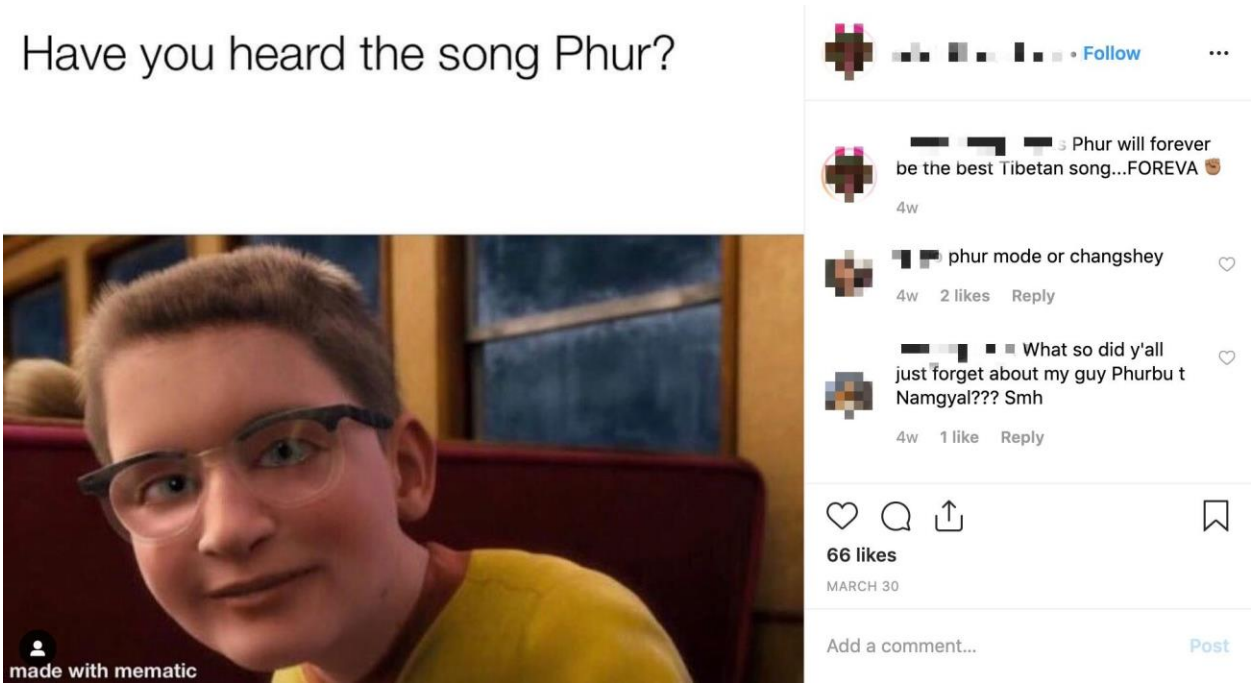

Figure 3.8

However, this does not make me discount the importance of YouTube to diasporic communities. Several activist campaigns are launched and advertised on YouTube, though not primarily. News is circulated through YouTube videos as well as through Twitter and Facebook. What I argue that sites like YouTube and Instagram provide to the Tibetan community in diaspora is the *access* to cultural artifacts (such as art and music) that might otherwise be inaccessible. These sites allow for global flows of art and music which form a larger media-scape (Appadarai 1996) in which Tibetans in multiple countries may consume and distribute experiences, knowledge, and creativity.

Does the Technology Really "Connect"?

So far, I have focused on policies and practices of engagement within the Tibetan diaspora in a way that focuses on either "inside" or "outside" of Tibet, which, in my defense, is very often how diasporic Tibetans themselves organize and discuss matters of community. However, one of the questions I sought to answer through this research is how digital

technologies connect Tibetans in diaspora and to what extent this is an important phenomenon for such communities. That, in detail, is another chapter in this thesis, but from here I will conclude with some thought on the capabilities and implications of connecting technologies such as the ones dealt with above writ large.

First examined by Goldsmith and Wu (2006) and reaffirmed by Zuckerman (2013) and (Srinivasan 2017), geography continues to matter in the digital age. Regional access to internet technologies is unequal and stratified, bringing into question the vision of the "flat world", proposed by Friedman (2005) as one in which geographical divisions become irrelevant in the globalized world. Rather, globalization's inequalities prevent such even footing. For example, Zuckerman (2013) specifically critiques what he refers to as "digital cosmopolitanism", or the idea that technology connects and allows us to interact ubiquitously with any part of the world at any time. While he concedes that new digital technologies such as social media do connect the world in novel ways, they do little to genuinely connect world populations. In one of his book's more powerful examples, he cites a project he completed in 2003 in which he wrote an algorithm that identified news stories by what country they covered. He found that similar patterns emerged in which the entire state of Africa was largely ignored (80).

Couple this with the "media bubble" most social media users confine themselves to. Zuckerman (2013) actually argued that news becomes curated based on *who* we know, so what we know is dictated by our social groups. Even before the founding of sites like Facebook, states like China were developing tight restrictions on internet traffic transnationally. The "Great Firewall" is one such example of a state influencing the ways in which technology may behave transnationally. In other words, the "flat world" is certainly untrue even in the digital sense.

Interestingly, in the case of Tibetans living in diaspora, when I asked if digital technologies made them feel at all more connected to the diasporic community, they said no. They were quick to identify technologies such as WeChat as important to the maintenance of social connections (family, friends, etc.) and linguistic practices, but were hesitant to say that these technologies made them feel anymore connected to the community on a larger scale. For my participants, physical meetings meant far more than what digital technology could offer.

Therefore, if we are to understand "connection" as a form of linking through mediated communication, then, yes, applications like WeChat and Facebook are a positive tool for the Tibetan community. However, if we use the term "connect" to imply that digital technologies allow for some deeper sense of community among Tibetans in diaspora, then my participants would disagree. Instead, it is vital that we heed Victoria Bernal's (2014) argument to consider the nation as "networks" in which connections are made and maintained through mediated technology. As Bernal argues, the internet does not create the transnational political field, but transformed it (49). In essence, I must treat the answer to this section's question in a necessarily contradictory fashion. That is to say, the answer is both "yes" and "no". This subject is to be covered further in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Geopolitical Contexts and Transnational Hegemony

Big Brother Goes Global

"Big Brother is Watching You" is something that has been repeated in common usage for so long, some might not even know where it originated, but *1984* by George Orwell haunts me now more than it has ever before. In 2017, *Wired* magazine published an article outlining the controversial Chinese "social credit system" to be rolled out between the time of publishing and 2020, when it would become mandatory for citizens to participate (Botsman 2017).[37] The article was entitled "Big data meets Big Brother" and what a troubling title it was. This system is built off of the collection of user data from various digital media applications which is then to be used to assign the user a "good citizen score" dependent on their activities. Coupled with China's already vast and growing surveillance state, this could mean individuals would be denied travel tickets, loans, or even jobs based on their score. This is a troubling development for internet freedom in China, which was already troubled (Goldsmith and Wu 2006; Roberts 2018).

Except it was already a problem transnationally.

Digital surveillance is not a new phenomenon and it is not isolated to China. Edward Snowden's revelations regarding surveillance on US citizens and the numerous reports by CitizenLab at the University of Toronto demonstrate the widespread, global use of such methods. Google and Facebook have been consistently criticized in both the media and government bodies for their misuse of user data, data breaches, discriminatory algorithms, and dissemination of dangerous false information. What these journalists, and even some scholars, have been slow to

[37] https://www.wired.co.uk/article/chinese-government-social-credit-score-privacy-invasion

critique is the ways in which state entities were influencing not just their citizens, but other groups transnationally through such digital mediums.

This chapter demonstrates some of those instances. I examine how the specter of Orwell's "Big Brother" affects populations of Tibetans in the US transnationally and how we can understand these processes through already established theoretical frameworks.

Before beginning this research, I was forewarned by other researchers that I might find some resistance in participants to talk about online activities due to a prevalent fear among ethnic-Tibetans that loved ones in China will be threatened. In fact, several individuals did reject my invitations to participate specifically for this reason. The individuals most willing to participate in my research were those who had no familial connections within China. When I presented my informed consent document to my participants, I always tried to explain in further detail the risks that were possible in participating. One man, a business owner I have here named Tashi, impatiently waved me away saying "I don't care about any of that. It doesn't apply to me." Another individual, a university student here referred to as Pema, told me that it was good I put that in there "because some Tibetans will be afraid for that."

To readers unfamiliar with the contentious subject of Tibetan sovereignty and Chinese policy, these fears may sound paranoid. One might even laugh when I say that I too felt anxious when broaching the subject around Chinese individuals, as I did when I lectured on my research for an undergraduate course which contained three Chinese international students and again when I was beginning to know a colleague recently. However, that feeling is the result of Foucault's (1977) "panopticism" and "transnational governmentality" (Gupta and Ferguson 2002; Schiller 2005). It is a situation of power at play that benefits only the hegemonic authority that spawns it when we censor ourselves in fear of it.

Most Tibetans living in the US are keenly aware of this, as evidenced humorously by Tashi when I told him about such concerns. “You are too careful,” Tashi said. “You are a free American, but you are not free. Your mind is under Chinese control. And it is not because of China, but because you are surrendering some of your own freedom.” In this way, he succinctly summarized the concept of governmentality, which Foucault (1991) envisioned as the art of government to produce and reproduce the ideal citizen in the eyes of the state, and hegemony as systems which has become transnational. Less humorously, he followed this up with “You know, these reasons are why we left Tibet, you know strong restrictions, no freedom, which is not how it is supposed to be here.” Before this, I had not thought of how frustrating it must be to escape an imperial power only to have its shadow follow you across the world.

Technology affects both human agency and hegemonic power. To understand both processes better, I examine more traditional forms of hegemony, such as fear, first and expand on the specific ways actors express their own agency through technology after.

Panopticism and Transnational Governmentality

Foucault (1977) described his conception of ‘discipline’ and the panopticon as an all-encompassing and self-operating “situation of power of which [subjects] are themselves the bearers,” (201). This system of surveillance and hegemonic control is most effective when it can exist outside of direct interference from a state authority. In other words, individuals propagate the panopticon through their own self-censorship and subsequent surveillance of their peers. In addition, Foucault notes that panopticism need not be directly attached to a state apparatus (though it often is) and is not necessarily bounded within the confines of a nation-state. Rather, this system of power and authority infiltrates and connects other institutions (such as non-state

actors) in order to extend "power to the most minute and distant elements. It assures an infinitesimal distribution of the power relations," (ibid, 216).

This concept has been demonstrated through the examples I note below. I removed issues of Tibetan history and culture from my class syllabus due to outside pressure. I stayed silent during the controversy of the Taiwanese flag in a parade. No direct state intervention prevented me from doing these things, rather, I willingly obliged for one reason or another. The advertisers who were wary of funding an obscure soccer event with a Tibetan team in England also demonstrate this concept.

The fear and apprehension to discuss Tibetan topics to which my participants referred is an example of such situations of power becoming embodied and replicated endlessly. Tashi's criticism of Americans who are "too careful" around the subject of Tibet or China is poignant, arguing that one is not really free if one's mind is controlled to an extent by China. Whether he meant to or not, he directly identified the heart of the concept of the panopticon, a prison in which we ourselves become jailors.

A central tenant of panopticism is surveillance. This can be in the form of state surveillance or the surveillance of one's peers who maintain the possibility of reporting one's actions. In the digital, an individual is literally never certain when surveillance is occurring. Therefore, users of services such as Facebook, Twitter, or WeChat must assume that surveillance is constant and therefore the situation of power is propagated once again, perhaps even more effectively, in a digital environment.

The panopticon forms a part of Foucault's larger analysis of the myriad ways in which states govern populations and conduct, what he termed "governmentality" (1991). Ferguson and Gupta (2002) extend Foucault's analysis from a state-centered framework to one that moves

beyond the vertical encompassment of the sovereign power to the local. They examine the ways in which hegemonic authority is produced and embodied abroad. Certainly, this involves numerous direct dealings with state authorities and geopolitics; however, Ferguson and Gupta (2002) place their concept of "transnational governmentality" as a part of the neoliberal global setting and stress that processes of governmentality have been transferred to transnational, non-state entities (989). For example, NGOs and non-state entities such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO have made policy decisions directly privileging "first world" nations over the developing world (Escobar 1995). Therefore, how might other transnational organizations, such as digital media entities, play a role in transnational governmentality?

Ramesh Srinivasan takes on this topic in his book *Whose Global Village* (2017), where he critiques the digital divide which prevents a majority of the world population from having any say in the applications or development of digital technologies. The global village is a metaphor for the globalized and transnational world made possible by technology. Technology such as the internet is viewed as a great, utopic connector, providing agency to those who may otherwise be denied in the wake of overwhelming hegemonic authority. Undoubtedly, this possibility is there and I will discuss it elsewhere, but here it is more interesting to discuss how developments in digital technology disenfranchise rather than connect. The question of "whose global village" precisely is it becomes very important to understandings of transnational governmentality and hegemony.

Imperial Power and Transnational Social Fields

My theoretical groundings to this point have dealt largely with the nation-state as a central unit of analysis. This is rightly criticized by Nina Glick Schiller's large body of work arguing against the use of such a strategy, which she terms "methodological nationalism", in

transnational studies (see Wimmer and Schiller 2002). Her criticism of this approach to transnational studies led her to propose the concept of the "transnational social field", borrowing from Bourdieu's concept of the ways in which social relationships are structured by power (Schiller and Fouron 1999; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Schiller 2005).

Transnational social fields free scholars from a limited analysis provided by thinking of communities as bounded by states, nations, or even ethnicity. These boundaries are fluid and they become even more complex through global media and technoscapes. However, the concept does not negate the previous examination of power and panopticism as examined above; rather, it reinforces the issue of transnational governmentality and surveillance. Schiller (2005) notes that examinations of globalization tend to 1) treat all nation-state entities as if they were equal across the global terrain and 2) obscure the influences of imperialism. Instead, she argues that it is more efficient to examine various imperialisms (not just Western powers) and the political-economic structures of power that serve specific states transnationally.

Living in the Shadow of Big Brother

There is a pervasive fear among many Tibetan-identifying individuals when discussing Sino-Tibetan politics. Some, like Tashi, argue that one should not be controlled by such fear and that there is a duty or responsibility that necessitates their active participation in politics. This is something that has already been documented by Lauer (2015) in her study on second generation Tibetan refugees. Tashi described his duty as such:

> Part of our ethnicity demands responsibility. So you know we try to uh…you know I won't be so active if I am from an independent nation, but being from Tibet with what is going on inside Tibet, you know intentional systemic destruction of cultural, religious, everything, *language*. So you know this gives a strong responsibility to preserve and represent Tibetan on every platform. Tibetan culture, traditionally language. And you know just assisting or helping personally anyone with interest in Tibet. It is like, you know, you represent Tibet and therefore you need to help preserve the culture, tradition, language.

This was one of the most important things Tashi has said to me and I will return to it several times, but what is interesting here is what makes him so comfortable in saying this. Recall that he waved away my information on risks and informed consent, saying "that does not apply to me." He flatly rejects the perspective that transnational hegemony should affect such behavior; however, he is aware of the pervasive risk and fear of such power.

I asked him if he ever felt suspicious or had ever encountered issues of censorship or coercion when engaging with other Tibetans online (or physically for that matter). He told me that he is sometimes suspicious when WeChat "doesn't seem to work properly," such as when a picture refuses to send or a message is never received. While he was not overly concerned with what was more than likely minor glitches, the fact that the application is developed and monitored by the Chinese state and the implications therein make him wary. He is not without cause to be concerned on this subject, however. CitizenLab, a research laboratory based out of the University of Toronto, conducted several studies of WeChat (a Chinese government surveilled social media app and the most popular social media platform among Chinese citizens) and found that numerous texts and images were censored if they fit categories deemed "subversive" by the Chinese state (2017a[38], 2017b[39], 2017c[40], 2018a[41], 2018b[42]).

The same subconscious hesitance to which Tashi referred is repeated in other stories told by Tibetans. For example, Pema, a 22-year old university student living in the US, told me about a presentation she gave to fellow university students alongside her friend and fellow Tibetan. She stressed to me that the presentation did not deal with the political side of the Tibetan issue, but

[38] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/04/we-cant-chat-709-crackdown-discussions-blocked-on-weibo-and-wechat/
[39] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/07/analyzing-censorship-of-the-death-of-liu-xiaobo-on-wechat-and-weibo/
[40] https://citizenlab.ca/2017/11/managing-message-censorship-19th-national-communist-party-congress-wechat/
[41] https://citizenlab.ca/2018/08/cant-picture-this-an-analysis-of-image-filtering-on-wechat-moments/
[42] https://citizenlab.ca/2018/08/how-wechat-filters-images-for-one-billion-users/

rather issues of environment and education inside of Tibet (despite these being intricately linked to politics regardless). Her description of the event follows:

> We opened the floor to Q&A, so one of the girls asked about political activism inside of Tibet. And then, uh, my friend, uh, whose family are inside of Tibet, had the microphone, the mic in her hand, and she looked at me and I saw that tension in her eyes. She was like "should I go or should I not?" There was this fear. Because there was no way…there was maybe one guy who immigrated from Hong Kong and there was one girl who later came to us saying that she was Chinese but she was born in the US, raised in the US, she was adopted by an American parent. She was sad to know about this. Other than that there were no Chinese elements and still there was that fear in her face…Tibetans inside Tibet cannot act as openly as we can. Because we…it's very…risky for them to do that. Not just for them but their family too.

Pema stressed two things when recounting this story. The first was that her presentation did not involve the contentious issue of Tibetan sovereignty or independence from China and that, therefore, there should have been no danger. In addition to this, she was clear to note only two plausibly Chinese individuals in the audience (something she could not have been certain of until after the presentation when she learned of the audience members). Again, this would seem to pose no threat. The second was the hesitance and fear to talk about the act of protests and self-immolations within Tibet.

When she says, "there were no Chinese elements", Pema is referring to a lack of physical Chinese presence or authority. However, the wariness of such hegemonic authority being omnipresent even transnationally is the highlight of this story. Pema's conclusion was that this fear is to be attributed to the connection of her friend's family to the Chinese state and her worry that her family members will be negatively affected by her actions. I cannot conclude that this is anything but intentional and is a transnational extension of governmentality and "panopticism", as described by Foucault (1977), that make any matter involving Tibet necessarily political and off-limits according to the Chinese state.

This concept extends into the digital as well. In fact, I argue that it becomes easier for Chinese state hegemonic authority to become transnational. Pema's example shows how it can become so through traditional means of panopticism, where the fear of being reported and the threat of punishment bestowed upon one's family molds behavior across state boundaries. The following shows how digital technologies can be even more effective in such processes.

When Pema lived in India, she recalls taking part in a yearly protest organized by Students for a Free Tibet (and organization headquartered in Dharamsala, India, but with chapters in countries all around the world) marking the anniversary of the March 10th, 1959 Tibetan Uprising. Pema notes that the protests took place in India and participants consented to group photographs while taking place in a blatant act of political dissent. However, she remembers that some of her friends asked the organization to take down their photographs from the corresponding Facebook page because "it was too risky for them to be holding the Tibetan flag." This is interesting as it shows a difference in levels of comfort with one's image being connected to a tangible photograph versus a digital artifact anyone can access.

This phenomenon is well substantiated by numerous accounts that have been shared with me as well as online and in the literature. The image of the Dalai Lama, the cornerstone of Tibetan religious and cultural identity, is forbidden in any from within Chinese controlled territories and mobile applications. Every participant noted some form of concern when it came to sharing an image of either the Dalai Lama or the Tibetan flag in digital environments. Pema's friend was criticized by his parents for contacting them on WeChat when his profile picture was the 14th Dalai Lama. Tashi noted that those living in the West must be careful about such images, lest they implicate their family members in some way. Activists and other individuals practice agency and resistance in numerous ways, which will be examined elsewhere.

Control

These ethnographic examples serve to evidence the fear and hesitance Tibetan individuals and their allies can demonstrate due to transnational hegemony and governmentality. Now I will turn to concrete examples of Chinese state influence in transnational political examples. The example of Roy Jones (Ma 2018) is a good one, but I have expanded on that in the introduction.

Chinese authorities also often attempt to discredit or demonize the Dalai Lama on the international stage. This is a formidable challenge given that he has been a popular figure in the world since his exile. Historically speaking, the Dalai Lama has served as the face of the Tibetan independence movement until he stepped down from the Central Tibet Administration (CTA) in 2011 and no longer advocates for wholesale Tibetan independence. However, as a pillar of Tibetan religious and ethnic identity, he is still viewed negatively as a separatist by Chinese authorities.

This negative evaluation often demonstrates itself with the Dalai Lama comes into any form of contact with foreign politicians or celebrities. In the case of celebrities, such as Lady Gaga who met with him in 2016, they are simply banned from the country (Phillips 2016).[43] Foreign dignitaries or politicians, however, risk much more when meeting with the man. In 2016, the state threatened "countermeasures" against France when the Dalai Lama spoke before the EU Parliament (Wong 2016).[44] In 2017, the state issued a warning that meeting with the Dalai Lama was a "major offence" and would bear consequences (The Times of India 2017).[45] In 2018,

[43] https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jun/28/china-lady-gaga-ban-list-hostile-foreign-forces-meeting-dalai-lama
[44] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-eu-dalailama/china-threatens-countermeasures-after-dalai-lama-speaks-at-eu-parliament-idUSKCN11P0V9
[45] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/meeting-dalai-lama-major-offence-china-warns-world-leaders/articleshow/61161639.cms

during a visit to the US, a group of Chinese delegates from the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), who are ethnically Han, the majority ethnicity, warned American diplomats to refrain from any contact with the Dalai Lama (Leng and Delaney 2018).[46]

Annually, China seems to send a reminder to the world that engaging with the subject of the Dalai Lama or Tibet is a recipe for disaster politically and economically, as China's economic success has continued to grow over the past decade and now maintains much more economic capital and cache than it had in the previous century. As another recent article by Wayne Ma (2018b) put it, "if you want to do business in China," –and many, many do—"mind your T's: Tibet and Taiwan."[47] [48]

These threats affect more than companies trying to be successful in Chinese markets. In my own experience and pedagogy, I use the issue of Tibet as a teaching tool and discuss it often. In 2016, I led a "Chinese Book Club" for a professor that was designed as an alternative to the final project for an intercultural communication course. The goal of the course was to better understand Chinese culture as a whole through a selection of readings. Tibetans being one of the recognized minority ethnicities within China, I felt it was a worthwhile topic. The Chinese students I recruited to discuss the topic with Western students did not agree and, though they were happy to participate in other sessions of the course, they would not participate in discussions involving Tibet or Taiwan. Without Chinese students to share their emic

[46] https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2146397/chinese-delegation-visiting-us-officials-warns-about

[47] https://www.wsj.com/articles/if-you-want-to-do-business-in-china-mind-your-ts-taiwan-and-tibet-1527937201

[48] This means it behooves multi-national corporations to hire individuals well versed in certain cultures in order to be sensitive to their cultural values as well as their cyber-policies for advertising. This is an important note to confront here because anthropologists would be precisely suited for such a position. At least in the case of China, it would beg the question of if fulfilling such a position that requires one to further marginalize certain cultures for the sake of company profit does not fulfill the same role as the earlier anthropologist in service of the imperial apparatus (Asad 1973).

perspectives, the course would lose its value for what it was designed to do and I therefore was forced to discard the material.[49]

In the same year, I also served as a member of the Ball State International Ambassador's Association. Each year, the students and the Rinker International Center organize several events showcasing the various world cultures from which the international student body hails. For one such event, a banner was being crafted by students comprised of the flags of several nation-states. One of the flags included was Taiwan's and led several Chinese students to complaining about its inclusion, while one of our Taiwanese students, Yùwén remained silent, having been the one to provide the flag. It was decided that the Taiwanese flag be removed to appease the Chinese students, who outnumbered the other group members by a good margin.[50] I did not then ask Yùwén how she felt about this, but I was struck by—and continue to be reflective on—what it would mean to be denied the opportunity to proclaim your nationality in a community which was designed to make international students feel included and respected.

Outside of the US, other situations show the same pattern. In October 2018, NPR reported on an obscure soccer tournament in London, which focused on an interesting concept of a model World Cup consisting of various minority peoples, including displaced populations such as Tibet. Specifically, the article recalls some of the examples I have noted above such as Marriot, when the author writes: "The Chinese government has been so effective at intimidating Western businesses on this front that sometimes companies do the [CPC's] work for it (Langitt

[49] I should note here, for critical readers, that I was not a professor, nor even a graduate student, and therefore had much less authority and clout within my role as instructor than others might have.

[50] Similar incidents have been reported at universities in South Korea (http://www.tibetanreview.net/korean-university-forced-to-apologize-to-china-over-separate-tibet-booth-at-intl-student-festival/), England (http://www.tibetanreview.net/university-in-england-bans-tibetan-flag-after-chinese-student-threatened-to-inform-embassy/), as well as elsewhere in the US at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (http://www.tibetanreview.net/united-states-university-bans-tibetan-flag-from-parade-of-nations-event/). It is noted that these sources come from a Tibetan site that acts as a sort of watchdog and specialized news source for Tibetans in exile and will be discussed later.

2018).[51] In this example, advertisers seeking to sponsor the tournament requested the Tibetan team be removed before they agreed to participate. The organizers, to their credit, refused, but it demonstrates that even in seemingly small and inconsequential situations, companies and organizations fear the reaction of the ever-watchful Chinese state.

Another way in which the CCP and the Chinese state attempt to influence global perspectives is through the use of "soft power". I will examine that concept more thoroughly below, but this is emphatically the goal of the CCP according to Xi Jinping in 2014, when he argued in a state address that "We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world," (Miller 2014). One of the more prominent mean through which China accomplishes this goal is through state funded international cultural outreach centers spread throughout the world called Confucius Institutes. Confucious Institutes are Chinese government funded and operated attachments to foreign universities and cultural centers with the goal of educating the world in Chinese language and culture and, as of now, there are over 500 spread across 140 countries.

These institutes were the subject of examination by Brazys and Dukalskis (2019), who proposed that the purpose of such initiatives is that of "grass roots image management", which they explain is the process by which a hegemonic power attempts to influence perspectives of domestic populations with the hope that it "bubbles up" to political elites and thereby improves the rising power's image and favor in global geopolitics. Their methods involved using data from the Global Database of Language, Events and Tone (GDELT) to perform a geospatial analysis of the tone of media reports involving China in regions within a locality housing a Confucius

[51] https://www.npr.org/2018/10/03/636299830/how-the-chinese-government-works-to-censor-debate-in-western-democracies

Institute. They found that proximity to an institute improved the positive tone in media reports by 6% post-founding.

That, in and of itself, does not form the basis of much concern. As an anthropologist, why would I argue against the cultural exchange and understanding these institutes might provide? My concern lies in one of the criticisms that has repeatedly been lodged against them: that they are propaganda arms of the Chinese state and come with political strings attached such as the wholesale ban of discussing topics such as Taiwan and Tibet and curriculums under the control of the Chinese government (Editorial Board of *The Guardian* 2014).[52]

Digital Giants

As I have argued, the distinction between physical and digital processes is unimportant, as one could argue that one is just an extension or a permeation of the other; however, I do want to highlight the ways in which technologies can make issues of fear and control more concerning. One such example is that of China and Internet technology giant Google.

For this, some brief context is necessary. Chinese internal policy dictates state censorship of various media content. Specifically, search results are censored to remove information the state deems "sensitive" or harmful to the "unity" of China (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005; Lei 2017; Roberts 2018). As mentioned above, images of contentious Chinese figures, such as activists, are banned from being displayed or listed on webpages or search results. Among these figures are the Dalai Lama and Liu Xiaobo, an activist critical of the CCP. This latter example specifically is of interest. After being imprisoned for his political activities, Xiaobo was given medical parole and subsequently died in June 2017. Following his death, any text, image, or data

[52] https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-price-of-confucius-institutes/2014/06/21/4d7598f2-f7b6-11e3-a3a5-42be35962a52_story.html?utm_term=.1c3259744f0f

relevant to Xiaobo was censored, including candle emojis to represent mourning on Chinese social media.

The Citizen Lab analyzed this censorship through popular Chinese media apps WeChat and Weibo (Crete-Nishihata et al. 2018).[53] In the case of WeChat, accounts connected to a Chinese mainland phone number would be subject to surveillance and censorship, even if the user later switched numbers to a non-domestic number. Likewise, images or text being sent to such an account would also be subject to censorship. This would be why individuals like Tashi feel suspicious when their applications do not operate as expected.

These are, of course, only examples from within the bounds of Chinese state authority and this thesis, while related, is not set to examine such internal policy in depth; however, when a Western company works to create a search engine specifically applicable to Chinese state censorship laws, we see the transnational nature of hegemonic authority once again.

One of the first examples of this dealt with Yahoo in the early 2000s. Yahoo as a company proclaimed to have libertarian values and believed fervently in the early dream of the internet ushering in a truly "deterritorialized" global future. The company encountered difficulties in France, first, a landmark court case found the search engine company going up against the authority of the French state to police their own areas of cyberspace. The French government was concerned about media content (such as Nazi-sympathizers and Holocaust deniers) having free reign in digital spaces when such things are illegal within the country. Yahoo stood its ground arguing that the French court did not have authority over a foreign company and that it would impossible for Yahoo to curb internet content within a specific

[53] https://web.archive.org/web/20170717140506/https://citizenlab.ca/2017/07/analyzing-censorship-of-the-death-of-liu-xiaobo-on-wechat-and-weibo/

region. In 2001, Yahoo lost this case and was ordered to make an effort to curb such content within the state of France (Goldsmith and Wu 2006).

After their competitor, Google, began to rise in popularity, Yahoo sought out new territories in which to conduct business. They sought to gain a foothold in China, a state already cognizant of the issues of censoring internet content. The Chinese state demanded that Yahoo censor certain content according to the wishes of the CCP and in 2002, Yahoo agreed (Goldsmith and Wu 2006). Specifically, an incident of note should be examined here. In 2005, an activist in China named Shi Tao sent an email to a US website which contained recordings of a CCP meeting that discussed how to handle the anniversary of Tiananmen Square. Shi Tao used a Yahoo email address and, once the CCP found the content on the US site, demanded Yahoo help them identify the individual. Yahoo acquiesced and Shi Tao was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment.

Goldsmith and Wu (2006) examine this event as a specific example of terriortialized nature of cyberspace. They examine this in conjunction with other case studies proving that digital encounters are not free from global political and economic forms of governance. Geography and state hegemony are still important concepts in cyberspace. Indeed, in the Yahoo example, Chinese state authority compelled the obedience of a Western company to identify a user of its service in order to continue doing business within the territory, essentially making Yahoo an extension of Chinese state censorship.

A more recent example of this is Google's "Project Dragonfly", which was meant to be a competitor for the Chinese search engine, Baidu. The project was meant to introduce a Google developed search engine to Chinese cyberspace which was compatible with state censorship laws. As with the example of WeChat, users would have been connected to search results and

online activity by their phone numbers, further allowing for state surveillance (Smith 2018).[54] The project was leaked to Western media outlets by developers at Google, several of whom quit in response to the project. The story quickly became controversial, compounded by a new public wariness for digital media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and their involvement in the dissemination of "fake news" and foreign interference in political processes. One US lawmaker claimed that the project proved China's "successful efforts to recruit Western companies to their information control efforts," and Vice President Mike Pence lambasted the company for contributing to state censorship and authoritarian rule.

"Dragonfly" was actually a consequence of a preceding foray for the company in the Chinese market. Google launched a Chinese version of their popular search engine in 2006 and immediately received criticism from Chinese authorities who requested that their search results be censored based on blacklisted topics within the country, just like Yahoo. Also, like Yahoo, Google agreed. In 2010, the company was a victim of what is known as "Operation Aurora", which was a sophisticated cyber-attack on several multi-national corporations. This led to many compromised Gmail accounts, notably several of which were Chinese human rights activists. It is believed that this was a Chinese state sponsored cyberattack performed by a unit of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) (Cyber Operations Tracker 2019).[55] Google responded by acknowledging the attack, which other companies did not do for fear of their economic success within China, and claiming the Chinese state was responsible. Fitting their self-professed technological motto "don't be evil", they pulled their operations out of the country, with some services still available in Hong Kong.

[54] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/sep/18/google-china-dragonfly-search-engine
[55] https://www.cfr.org/interactive/cyber-operations

Google, in its attempt to operate transnationally, seeks to develop technology befitting the wishes of the Chinese state, but, in doing so, their search engine would disenfranchise entire populations as the state saw fit. Brilliantly, a Tibetan artist lampooned this very concern in a political cartoon (Figure 4.1) published recently to *The Tibetan Review*, a digital news resource for the Tibetan community in exile. The cartoon depicts Google CEO Sundar Pichai behind a laptop addressing a large group of ethnic Uyghurs surrounded by barbed wire. He tells them "I can't liberate you from the concentration camp, but I'll be happy to exterminate you from the internet. OK?"

Figure 4.1

This biting critique focuses not just on the subject of reports of ethnic suppression in Western China, but specifically on Google's seemingly callous participation in covering up oppression through their development of "Project Dragonfly." Pichai has also been outspoken

about Google's use in Chinese businesses and digital infrastructure, despite apparently pulling out of the country after "Operation Aurora". Through the "Dragonfly" project, Google becomes an explicit force in Chinese digital politics, disenfranchising those who fall in the margins of the state.

Conclusion

This chapter has served to examine the myriad ways in which transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) is demonstrated in several different contexts. I have shown numerous examples of how my primary subject of the Tibetan diaspora is primarily affected, but others have been noted primarily due to their similarity and demonstration of a global pattern.

The focus of this chapter has been heavily state-centered, leaving little room for the agency of individuals that is one of the core interests of anthropology. Rather than examine these concepts in tandem, I have deemed it fit to do so separately. The subject of the state and transnational consequences of geopolitics in the digital era is important to not only our understandings of new technologies, but also of the effects they have on previously observed social processes.

Digital technologies connect the world better than any previous technology to date and they have therefore received much optimistic praise in their ability to unite; however, it is dangerous to ignore the very real ability of these technologies to divide, control, and suppress. This is especially interesting when such power becomes transnational. One could argue that these technologies merely show the progression in more efficient techniques of governing populations through advanced surveillance and censorship, as it has existed in the past. However, the globalized world is not so simple. If the world ever could be bounded within the imagined

communities of the nation-state (Anderson 1983), the connections and malleability of the global world and transnational fields (Schiller 2005) have rendered such analysis overly limited.

Moreover, the issue of cyberspace as a separate entity from traditional concepts of the physical reality are incredibly outdated given the physical consequences of seemingly innocuous acts within cyberspace. Roy Jones, Shi Tao, and so many more demonstrate that one's actions in the digital environment can lead to very real and devastating consequences such as losing a job or imprisonment. In the case of the Rohingya in Myanmar and the dissemination of hate speech on Facebook, it led to death genocide.

Questions that need to be addressed when reflecting on these issues include to what extent digital media developers should be held responsible for these consequences. What is the ethical concern for corporations that provide state entities with surveillance technology or report individual users to state governments? How should issues of oppression be dealt with in refugee communities when faced with the economic threats of an imperial power? These questions are not new, but they must be addressed in new ways in light of such technological developments.

Chapter 5: Being Tibetan (Online): The Danger, Resistance, and Negotiation of Diasporic Identity in Cyberspace

Introduction

This chapter was written at an auspicious moment in time. Every year the Tibetan diaspora community commemorates the anniversary of the March 10, 1959 Tibetan Uprising in Lhasa with fresh waves of protest, including street processions and protests before the Chinese consulate in major cities across the globe. This year marked the 60th anniversary of that tradition and brought with it a great deal of media attention, including a cover story in *Time* magazine featuring the Dalai Lama and other investigations of human rights in China from publications such as *The Guardian*[56] and *The Associated Press*.[57]

All of this brought to bear a few things of importance. First, conclusions that the issue of Tibet and the question of Tibetan sovereignty were diminished in the West were proven inaccurate. Specifically, as has been mentioned in this thesis, those who argued that "no one talks about Tibet anymore" are mistaken. Indeed, even official political discourses on issues important to Tibetans have not been forgotten. In the previous year, The Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act was made into law in the US, which requires that Congress be made aware annually of the restrictions imposed on diplomats and journalists wishing to travel to the Tibetan region in China *and* that no individual who contributes to said restrictions will be granted access to the US (Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018). For the 60th Anniversary of Tibetan Uprising Day, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi released a statement reaffirming American support for the Tibetan cause (Speaker of the House 2019).

[56] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/10/they-took-everyone-from-me-anger-lingers-60-years-after-tibet-crackdown
[57] https://apnews.com/bc525ad851bc4211a0ad3f390ba6f4d1

These events come on the heels of increased tensions between the West and China, including issues outlined in another chapter of this thesis on anxieties in the West of Chinese technological development and criticisms of human rights abuses in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region in China regarding labor camps and the Uighur ethnic population (see Keck 2018). It is not outside the realm of possibility (in fact it may be likely) that such offerings of support and protest to China are more to do with geopolitical anxieties of the nation-state's increased economic viability in technology (as can be noted in the Huawei controversy in the US and Canada, which can be read about here: Keane 2019).[58]

But what about Tibetans living in diaspora?

This chapter does not deal with the geopolitical complexities of political economy (though they appear beneath the surface) as that is the goal of other chapters. Instead, this chapter focuses on the diasporic community as it exists online. Specifically, the evidence that I have gathered through traditional and digital ethnographic methods deals primarily with individuals in the US and sparingly in Canada (Toronto to be specific). Even more specifically, this chapter is about the digital technologies and/or cyberspace that connects them. I will examine what I identify to be the two main ways in which Tibetan youth use such technologies in their daily lives and outline the importance of each according to data gathered in interviews and through the scholarly literature on the subject. These paths include the use of digital technology as 1) a tool for activism and resistance to transnational hegemony and governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) and 2) a space facilitating the negotiation of identity in diaspora.

[58] https://www.cnet.com/news/the-huawei-controversy-everything-you-need-to-know/

Technology, Agency, and Resistance

In December of 2018, Pema Dolma, a Tibetan-American activist launched an Indiegogo campaign called "Insert Tibetan Flag Emoji". As can be discerned from the title, the campaign's goal is to officially add the Tibetan flag (Figure 5.1) to the "flags" section of emojis available on mobile phones. To accomplish this, the campaign will be required to submit a proposal to the Unicode Consortium, a group made up of large information technology companies such as Google and Apple.

Figure 5.1

The author of the introduction describes the imperative of the campaign thusly:

> Flags represent the most comprehensive and universally recognised symbols through which communities around the world communicate their identity and a sense of belonging - yet the Tibetan flag is nowhere to be seen. Representation matters. We must remedy this.[59]

Benedict Anderson (1983) described a nation as "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign," and that even though most members will never meet, they share in their minds an "image of their communion," (6-7). Flags serve as representations of the imagined community and, in other words, form the literal image of communion among a nation. Moreover, according to Anderson, such symbols seek to represent

[59] https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/insert-tibetan-flag-emoji#/

the legitimacy and sovereignty of such imagined communities, without which the limited nature of the community becomes less defined. Specifically, the role of the flag in the imagined community is described by Leib and Webster (2007) to "'condense' a range of meanings and emotions pertaining to a group's perceived common historical experience, real or imagined cultural homogeneity, and efforts to define a similarity of outlook for the future," (31). One need not venture far in thought, therefore, to see the implications such an addition to an official list of emojis would have.

In addition to the Indiegogo fundraising campaign, the activists introduced viral social media marketing to not only spread their cause, but also to demonstrate why the Tibetan Flag Emoji would be a benefit to the community. On the campaign's official Instagram page (username: tibetflagemoji), a challenge was launched to post a photo with the #InstertTibetanFlag and a description outlining why the campaign was important to the user. As of this writing, over 600 individuals participated in the Instagram challenge and more on other media platforms. Figures 5.2 and 5.3 were created by the campaign to demonstrate the response.

Therefore, it would be a definitive victory for Tibetans who would see their nation, their imagined community, represented in both a digital space (the software that houses the flag) and the discursive spaces in which the flag would be deployed. Even without official support from larger technology companies, Tibetans outside of China and their allies will still use the flag in online discursive spaces (in either a .gif or image format, see Figure 5.4). In instances where I have seen this phenomenon, it has been in response to a post or comment attempting to undermine Tibetan national identity, such as news stories relating to Chinese state censorship or language restriction. The act of deploying the flag in these situations is therefore political as well as cultural.

Figure 5.2

Figure 5.3

It is to be expected that the adoption of the Tibetan flag within the emoji lexicon would prompt backlash from Chinese state authorities (based on evidence presented in Chapter 4). Likely, the geopolitical context of the flag and the Chinese state's history of transnational censorship efforts will draw the Chinese state's ire. This is especially likely given the increasingly important stake tech giants like Google have in China.

Regardless of what may be, the concern I felt was valid enough to broach with Pasang, who works with the campaign. Her response was:

> That's one of the challenges of it. So, if you look at the, um, the bylaws of the Emoji Committee and what reasons they would have to object to this. First of all, they don't take flags that are like kind of political symbols. They only take flags that are representatives of identities that people hold in the communities and if enough people hold an identity, then they will put the flag in. Kind of as like the general consensus of the flag issue. So, I think moving that flag away from being a political image. I mean it'll always be a political image when, when there is like a huge, massive powerful country like China and a thing like this country [here she refers to Tibet] doesn't exist. Having a flag that represents that country will always be a political issue I feel. But essentially, yeah, essentially if we're able to kind of create a cultural presence for the identity and show just how important it is to someone's cultural identity…I think that is the main argument of our campaign.

Her response is enlightening in a number of regards. Specifically, she accepts the expected challenge the campaign will face in regard to the political nature of the flag as a symbol of a nation the Chinese state insists does not exist. Tibetan activists are not naive nor ignorant of transnational governmentally and power. When she notes that Tibet does not exist, she is not referring to the Tibetan nation, but rather the state of Tibet. Most importantly, she argues that an attempt, at least, should be made to separate the flag as a cultural symbol from the political controversy that would envelop it.

I can make no better argument than the activists themselves made in their official proposal to the Unicode Consortium following the completion of the campaign's fundraising:

> There is certainly precedent for this inclusion, with other major regions of China, such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, already listed for RGI. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, for Tibetans, whether they live in Tibet or as part of the worldwide diaspora, the flag of Tibet is not a sub-regional flag but their *national* flag. For them, the ability to express their identity via emoji would be extremely beneficial…The fact that Tibet is a contested region and not a UN member state is clearly not a barrier as this applies to many other flags that are currently RGI. Both Palestine and Western Sahara currently have RGI flags despite being disputed territories. In fact, Taiwan's flag is RGI despite also being viewed by some as a disputed region of China (Tibetan Flag Emoji website 2019, emphasis mine).[60]

The reference to Palestine and Taiwan does not help to disentangle the flag from its political symbolism, but it does seek to highlight the hypocrisy of a contingency in which these flags are given official status and Tibet is not. More than that however, the entirety of the campaign, the backers involved in fundraising, and the individuals who helped to spread the message are a part of a large network of agents seeking to resist the homogenization and erasure of Tibetan identity. The activists behind this campaign highlight the reverse of my previously pessimistic observations of technology and identity. In short, they demonstrate the agency of individuals and groups to resist hegemonic authority through technology (in this case many different technologies, e.g. crowdfunding, social media, and emojis on mobile phones).

John Postill (2014) refers to such agents as "freedom technologists" or "to refer to those geeks, hackers, online journalists, tech lawyers and other social agents who combine technological skills with political acumen to pursue greater Internet and democratic freedoms, both globally and domestically," (2). Specifically of interest, Postill (2014) does not identify "freedom technologists" as techno-utopians (as Morozov (2012) critiqued) or "slacktivists" (Skoric 2012, cited in Postill 2014). Rather, he argues that such social agents are actually "techno-pragmatists" who have very realistic ideas of the limitations as well as the possibilities

[60] https://www.tibetflagemoji.com/blog/2019/2/12/read-the-proposal

of new digital technologies for political movements. I believe Tibetans, especially younger digital "natives", fall squarely in this category.

Not only do Tibetans understand the limiting aspects of said technologies (see Chapters 3 and 4 on digital surveillance), but they also see the potential in technology to free them from the constraints of diaspora and dislocation. For example, Pasang noted that she did not feel more or less Tibetan in online spaces; however, she did feel that the scope of her connection to the Tibetan diaspora was enhanced through these technologies, not even considering the benefits such mediums provide to activism. Here she illustrates her point in response to my question of whether or not she felt a difference in Tibetanness in digital spaces compared to physical ones:

> I would say like I think it's, it's more about like scope. It's more about the scope. Like for example, I had the capacity to engage in those communities on a wider scope than in person. But I think nothing really beats in person. Like in person the things that me and my local Tibetan young students do is we'll get together once a week or like once a month for like 'momo night' where we just like sit together and they actually physically make food and eat and laugh. And I think there's nothing that beats that. I guess in terms of feeling at one with the community, like being with other Tibetans and cook and eat food from our country and talking in our language and doing our own thing. You know, kind of like that feels, I think I feel more connected with my identity in that case, but I can't do that every day. And before I moved, I didn't really have that opportunity even once a month. So I think it's more of scope than depth.

She later explained that she *did* feel that technology was more effective when it came to organizing disparate groups, such as Tibetans and their allies, behind a cause (this has also been shown elsewhere, see Phillips 2008, 2014) She herself had worked a number of projects organized and marketed through social media, including work for Students for a Free Tibet and their "Tibet's Rivers, Asia's Lifelines" initiative, which was launched and advertised via YouTube. She explained her own opinions on technology and the boon it provides to the diaspora as such:

> Obviously you see like the Arab springs and everything like that and then also India is one of the countries that has like the highest, the fastest growing rate of access to internet through mobile phones and data plans and whatnot. And that has a big impact on Tibetans. So now anywhere you go, whether you're at a refugee school in Tibet or in Switzerland or in New York City, like all these Tibetans are kind of connected on these platforms. And I think the most important thing for me is it, it's just been in the past year, I think one year that's really compounded (sic) with are so many accounts, social media accounts on Facebook. Like pages and stuff on Instagram that really unify the messaging that people are receiving I think puts people on the same page. I think that's really important in creating like a solid identity for Tibetans. A big concern is always that for me it's like I noticed right away like if this is a Tibetan who spent a lot of time in Nepal and who has spent a lot of time in India and they both immigrated to the same country even after five or six years, usually they're hanging out in different groups.

Here she highlights the same fractured identities that Pema identified to me. Pema noted that her own sense of identity was made up of all the places she had lived, which differentiated her from her first-generation refugee parents. In her words, she describes why her multicultural background would make her feel alien if she ever returned to Tibet:

> The culture that I was raised in was multicultural. I am in a Tibetan culture and not just Tibetan but an Indian culture and now I am in America and I am like mixed up in so many different cultures, unlike my parents. My parents would feel more welcome than maybe me. Because, for me, it would just feel alien.

Of note here is how typical this is of disaporic communities and the children of refugees (see Bernal 2014; Hall 1990; Lanzelius 2006; Lauer 2015; Levitt and Schiller 2004; Ong 1999, 2003 ; Yeh 2007), but also how one's identity is not necessarily tied to the geographic homeland or an idea of "return".

In addition to such concepts of diaspora, the marginalized nature of the Tibetan community lends itself to Scott's (1985) examination of agency among the peasant class in Malaysia. He argued that the agency of the individual is notable in the everyday application of resistance to a hegemonic authority. He called the tools through which marginalized groups practice agency and resistance the "weapons of the weak". Alongside Postill's concept of the "freedom technologist",

this demonstrates the ways in which these tools may be utilized for the benefit of marginalized group activism and identity maintenance where they would otherwise be challenged by what Victoria Bernal (2014) has termed the "infopolitical state", the state hegemony through which information is censored, controlled, and disseminated.

The "weapons" of Tibetan netizens and activists are therefore platforms on which their cause may be amplified and their information less easily buried by an infopolitical state authority. Further, given this optimistic interpretation of social media technologies, the efforts of Chinese hegemons to censor digital efforts abroad is troubling. Efforts of resistance through the use of digital technology are more thoroughly detailed ahead.

Activists, NGOs, and the Internet

In this section, I will cover three case studies of NGOs working with Tibetans within China and in diaspora. In focus specifically is the transnational nature of each of these groups and also their focus and presence on digital media. To preface these case studies, I identify a philosophical divide I have observed among Tibetan activists.

The work of NGOs is of particular importance in the globalized world. There is a debate among scholars as to the effect, either positive or negative, of NGOs transnationally as they inherently tied to the state and the neoliberal globalized world (Bernal and Grewal 2014). Does the NGO weaken the relationship between the state and citizens or does it enhance the agency of individual citizens against state apparatuses? The answer to this question would largely depend on context. Mark Schuller (2012) has demonstrated the ways in which NGOs may become *de facto* state forces despite their intentions and has previously argued against the idea of the "neoliberal aid regime", as NGOs become intermediaries of the world system and become the

glue holding fragmented and weakened neoliberal conceptions such as divided states and state authority (209).

Bernal and Grewal (2014) point to the arguments that NGOs working within the neoliberal world system offer an alternative to traditional development strategies (a point which Schuller (2012) counters) and that some scholars have pointed to ability of NGOs to provide checks to unbalanced state power. These points can be observed in the application of NGOs to issues examined by Escobar (1995) and Srinivasan (2017) on the creation of the third world and the uneven development and access to technology globally, respectively. I argue that the case studies examined below demonstrate multiple perspectives on the NGO. First, Students for a Free Tibet are starkly outside of the control of the state, but insert themselves in numerous transnational causes, seeking to place a check on the Chinese state from outside of its (physical) boundaries. Another organization I reference below is *Rangzen* – International Tibet Independence Movement, which also fits within the first category alongside SFT. Second, Machik demonstrates precisely the neoliberal development NGO identified above. They work within the state for the development of Tibetan social and educational infrastructure. Finally, Tibetan Action Institute serves as an example of a hybrid between the two, offering technological interventions and council to groups with activist goals.

Philosophical Divide

There is a subtle philosophical divide among the Tibetan diaspora and its organizations. As Nowak (1984) examines, there are two identifiable philosophies of Tibetan activism: the *rangzen* path and the "middle way" approach. The first, *rangzen*, argues for separatism and true independence for the Tibetan people from Chinese rule. In other words, it signals that Tibet cannot truly be *free* whilst under the yoke of Chinese hegemonic oppression. The second,

labelled the "middle way" by participants such as Pema and Pasang, is immediately indicative of Buddhist philosophy (and the Dalai Lama). It is the compromise between two extremes (independence and subjugation with no freedom).

To demonstrate this difference, let us consider the mission statement of another organization, this one with the word *rangzen* (independence) literally it its name. Tashi pointed me towards "Rangzen – International Tibet Independence Movement (ITIM)", an organization founded in 1995 by Thupten Jigme Norbu (the Dalai Lama's eldest brother) and Larry Gerstein. ITIM's mission statements read as such: "We are dedicated to restoring Tibet's independence (*rangzen*) from China through non-violent action. Since 1997 we have advocated for rangzen by leading peace marches for Tibet's independence covering thousands of miles across North America," and "We march to sustain and support Tibetan culture; to raise awareness about the crisis in Tibet; and because 6 million Tibetans in Tibet cannot," (ITIM website 2014).[61] It is in that last phrase that one might recall with renewed importance Tashi's criticism of Americans who are "too careful" about upsetting China.

Now, juxtapose this with what Pasang told me about her experience as a Tibetan-American activist. In her words (and, for context, she is referring to the protests described earlier commemorating the March 10th Uprising in Lhasa, this one taking place in New York City):

> There are some Tibetans who believe in like the "middle path" and some will believe in like the *rangzen* path…there is like a tendency for even Tibetans that are "middle way" to censor those that are *rangzen*. Like, for example, at the March 10th protest in, I think it was 2015, there were Tibetans carrying "Free Tibet" signs that they made on their own. And actually those from the community that were pro-"middle path" actually told them, "Hey, you guys can't carry those signs." At the March 10th protests! And there was actually an altercation which almost led to like, well it was like a very heated altercation after which the police came over. They were like "What's the problem?" And then the gentleman said "Oh he can't carry that sign," to, you know, the man who had the Free

[61] http://www.rangzen.org/about-us/

Tibet sign. And the police said “Isn't this a Free Tibet rally?”

The police officer who asked, “Isn’t this a ‘Free Tibet’ rally?” may be forgiven, I think, for not understanding the nuance there, as I myself was unaware of the distinction before Tashi and Pasang told me about their beliefs. Pasang also made an interesting observation about those who partake in activism regardless of one’s philosophy:

> It's an unfortunate reality that many Tibetans in our generation are aware that they must make decisions. So, when I engage in political discussions, I know that I'm sacrificing visiting Tibet, which is where I'm like, you know, my family is from for generations.

Here, she clarified for me that some Tibetans in diaspora (though not her as she has no family in the region) would feel that it is necessary to be “middle path” so as not to jeopardize their access to the region, or, as noted elsewhere in this thesis, to put their family in harm’s way.

Pema also had some interesting observations about the nature of politics in the Tibetan community. She argues:

> Yeah. I feel like I don’t do it as much as I used to do earlier because personally, I feel like there is more important things to talk about right now, like education in Tibet, like employment inside Tibet. I mean its…we try to stay away from the political issues, because I feel that the political issues is kind of diverting our attention away from things that are more important. Like, not more important but as important as environmental issues inside of Tibet, like the educational issues inside of Tibet.

She also noted that some of her peers have a more frustrated and pessimistic approach to the idea of the homeland and Chinese sovereignty:

> They were like “So what if Tibet becomes free? So what if we can travel back to Tibet?” I really don’t know.

In my field notes, I marked that, at this point in the interview, Pema seemed rather exasperated (though not impatient) with the concept of politics, or, more specifically, fighting against the dominance of global Chinese hegemony. That is not to say that any of my participants (including

those examples observed online) felt that it was not worthwhile to engage in activism and resistance to the erasure of Tibetan culture, far from it.

There seems to a shift in younger generations of Tibetans towards a philosophy of pragmatism, meaning that the application of activist energy is best placed in pathways most likely to succeed and benefit the Tibetan population (both within Tibet and globally). Indeed, regardless of one's place on the philosophical spectrum, there are numerous instances of Tibetan agency and resistance worth noting.

Students for a Free Tibet

Far and away the most active of Tibetan activist group online is the international "Students for a Free Tibet". Founded in 1994 in New York City, this chapter-based non-profit organization rose to prominence through their collaboration with the Milarepa Fund, a non-profit founded by Adam Yauch (of Beastie Boys fame) and Erin Potts, in the organization of "Tibetan Freedom Concerts" of the 1990s. These "Live-Aid"-style concerts, featuring seminal rock acts of the 90s such as The Smashing Pumpkins and The Red Hot Chili Peppers, were designed to raise awareness and funds for Tibetan causes and contributed to the height of the "Free Tibet" movement in the US. The money raised here and in other fundraising activities helped to establish international chapters of the organization, such as those in India, Canada, and the UK. In this chapter, all three of those charters are important as they demonstrate transnational connections (Hannerz 1996) and the interconnectedness of diasporic individuals through such organizations.

Students for a Free Tibet describe their mission as such: "Through education, grassroots organizing, and nonviolent direct action, we campaign for Tibetans' fundamental right to

political freedom," (Students for a Free Tibet website).[62] This mission statement is clever, as it does not mention political independence or sovereignty per se and is line with the changing political philosophy of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan Government in Exile since 1959. In short, as time has gone on, the political reality of Chinese domination of the Tibetan plateau has become more total and therefore the goals of the movement have shifted from strict independence to "genuine autonomy" (Nowak 1984; Brinkerhoff 2009; Sangay 2018). However, a review of their website and social media presence will note a continuous use of the words "free" and "independent". This would make their organization a clear target for the Chinese state to label them "separatists" as is often the case with Tibetan NGOs.

The organization maintains a presence on their personal website[63] as well as on multiple social media sites such as Facebook,[64] Instagram,[65] and Twitter.[66] More complexly, the large, chapter-based organization also maintains pages for different nation-states in which the chapter is based. For example, "SFT - India", "SFT - Japan", "SFT - Denmark" all operate their own social media sites and choose individually which ones to utilize and which to exclude. For activist work, the largest concentration of activity for the largest of these chapters (the main US branch and the Indian chapter) is on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook respectively. Several universities, such as the University of Massachusetts - Amherst and University of Washington, also maintain chapters on their campuses.

Aside from being largely present on various social media platforms and serving as the predominant form of activism within the Tibetan exile community, the group also targets specific

[62] https://studentsforafreetibet.org/our-work/
[63] https://studentsforafreetibet.org/
[64] https://www.facebook.com/StudentsforaFreeTibet/
[65] https://www.instagram.com/sft_international/
[66] https://twitter.com/SFTHQ/

causes that they deem specifically important to Tibet and related groups. As of this writing, campaigns that are in focus include many of the notable issues my participants have identified. Pasang alone noted the "Tibet's Rivers, Asia's Lifelines" and "Free Tashi Wangchuk" initiatives, though the latter she did not specifically note, but hinted at. These along with the topics of Google's "Project Dragonfly" and the Confucius Institutes are platforms the group highlights.

Specifically, the group has recently been active against the "Dragonfly" project. Figure 5.4 shows the group protesting outside of the congressional testimony of Sundar Pichai in December of 2018. Notably, the group posted to Twitter throughout the day and shared articles related to "Dragonfly" to spread awareness of their protest and its connection to Tibet and the Uighur crisis in Xinjiang. Both are subjects more thoroughly examined in Chapter 4, but here it should be noted that the dangers of technological monopoly and omnipresence are not lost on freedom technologists such as these (Postill 2014). Linked on their webpage on the subject is the open letter to Google from the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF), a non-profit focusing on civil liberties and digital technology, which described the concerns of censorship and human rights violations by the Chinese state (O'Brien 2018).[67]

Machik

One of the more traditional NGOs regarding Tibet is Machik. Machik was founded by husband and wife Phuntsok and Tsering Rabgey in order raise money and fund the creation of a school in Kham, Eastern Tibet. The NGO's website notes that the Chungba Primary School was opened in 2002 with support from American businessman Chris Walters (affiliated with other

[67] https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2018/12/human-rights-groups-sundar-pichai-listen-your-employees-and-halt-project-dragonfly?fbclid=IwAR3DOqgAxbJaWcmXw9g-smRjgbM2j8-OTDuub6jJhCctjWBH8hR-5REYBh0

Figure 5.4 (Image credit: Students for a Free Tibet website 2019)

Central Asian education NGOs such as Bakarat[68]). Machik focuses on "social innovation in Tibet" and is primarily concerned with educational projects in rural counties in Kham.

Of interest here is the organization's focus on using digital technologies in revitalizing Tibetan language learning in the region. According to their website:

> Our work in this area has ranged from supporting local NGOs in building Tibetan-language online resources, establishing a digital classroom at the Chungba Middle School, to the development of the Mobile Digital Library, a pilot project designed in partnership with the Tibetan Himalayan Library to provide offline resources to schools and community libraries in remote rural areas. As part of our broader commitment to valuing local knowledge, we have partnered with the Maysles Film Institute and the Kham Film Project to facilitate the production of participatory video projects.

In fact, other transnational media undertakings have been organized by the organization. Their social media presence is small, but they work with a number of institutions, such as

[68] https://barakatworld.org/about

Columbia University's Digital Media Center, to design and disseminate media resources regarding Tibetan culture and language. One such endeavor among the Chungba Project is the collaborative film efforts of students. One of the highlights of the project was the creation of an advisory video arguing against doing drugs and littering (comparable to a Western after school special). This was created by and for Tibetan students and can be found on YouTube ("Making Good Choices" 2008).[69] However, the Machine YouTube page is not particularly active in showcasing these projects and they are disseminated rarely.

The organization also funds several women's initiatives in Tibet as well as self-sustainability initiatives and the implementation of environmentally friendly "green" technology. Finally, the NGO also seeks to highlight and support the work of what they call "Tibetan social entrepreneurs". This includes the work of directors and film entrepreneurs, advocates for women, and language activists.

I have highlighted this NGO for two reasons. First, it was identified to me by a participant, Pema, as a particularly important avenue for the future of Tibetan activism. She argued that Tibetan energy was better placed in pragmatic solutions such as development initiatives. She argued that education and infrastructure were more valuable than the politics of true independence. As noted above, this puts her at odds with many other Tibetans in the West. However, I also do not think that her arguments were clearly against the idea of Tibetan independence; rather, I think she was being pragmatic and showed what I have come to know as a nuance of perspective among Tibetans in exile. Tsering Wangmo Dhompa (2016), a Tibetan refugee born in India, wrote about such nuance in her memoir *Coming Home to Tibet*. She wrote:

> My hope is unsteady because I have been to Tibet and I have seen just how entrenched the Chinese are in my country. It is hard to imagine the Chinese will give up what they

[69] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUTodfN9kV4

> have sought to destroy and then to build in the last five decades. Within this anomaly and within these complexities, hope for a free Tibet seems a punitive effort. But to give up hope would signify worse: the end of all possibilities for a different future (188).

This identifies perfectly the pragmatic perspective of many younger Tibetans in exile, whilst distinguishing such a perspective from pessimism.

My second goal in examining Machik is to demonstrate the transnational actions of NGOs in language/cultural revitalization and development, which will be covered further below.

Tibet Action Institute

Tibet Action Institute (TAI) is the most digitally inclined of any Tibetan group. This is because digital media tools and interventions are their specific focus. Several of their projects are interesting to note, and Pasang made specific note of them to me once when she referred to a workshop which warned her against using WeChat. That is an excellent introduction to the work that TAI does.

When you first enter the website for the organization, one will notice immediately that it has, like the website for Students for a Free Tibet, an intuitive and attractive design. This contrasts with Machik, which seems dated and meant only to convey what text information the authors want advertised. In the case of TAI, the focus on social media and digital tools is evident from the Twitter ticker (an interface showing the most recent tweets) scrolling down the right side of the page. Their mission statement reads as:

> Tibet Action Institute combines the power of digital communication tools with strategic nonviolent action to build the strength and effectiveness of the Tibet movement. We bring together thought leaders, campaigners, and technology experts at the forefront of the Tibet movement to develop and implement visionary strategies designed to help Tibetans win their nonviolent struggle for human rights and freedom. Through innovative training, education, and technology development programs, we equip Tibetans with new tools and strategies to help them win in their struggle for human rights and freedom in Tibet (TAI website, 2019).

The thesis here is clear: they provide new, digital freedom fighting tools to the Tibetan activist. This is the definition of Postill's (2014) "freedom technologist". In some cases, their initiatives seem to be direct responses to issues related in Chapter 4 and identified by groups such as CitizenLab at the University of Toronto. One such initiative is on "Digital Security" and the group has compiled a number of helpful guides to protect Tibetans abroad and those they contact within the state of China (TAI website, 2019). Figures 5.5 and 5.6 identify some of these.

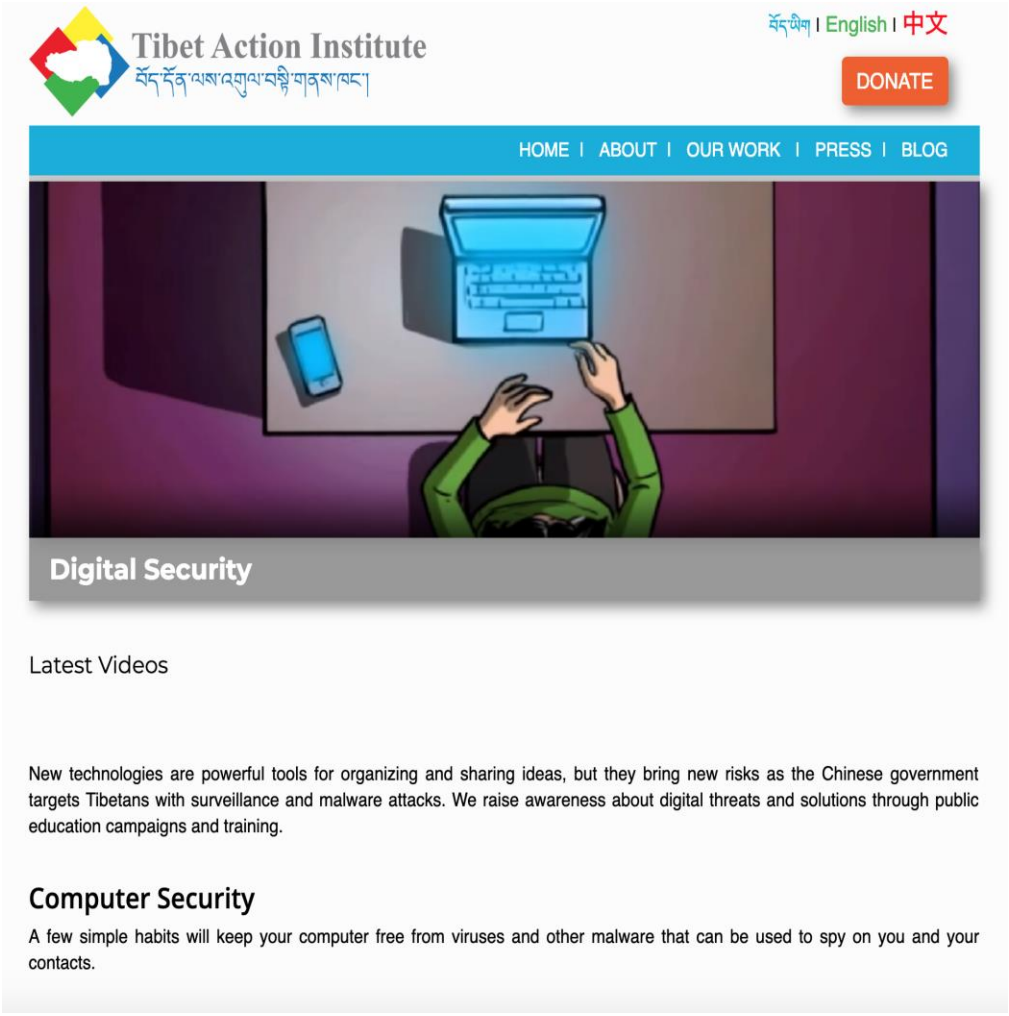

Figure 5.5

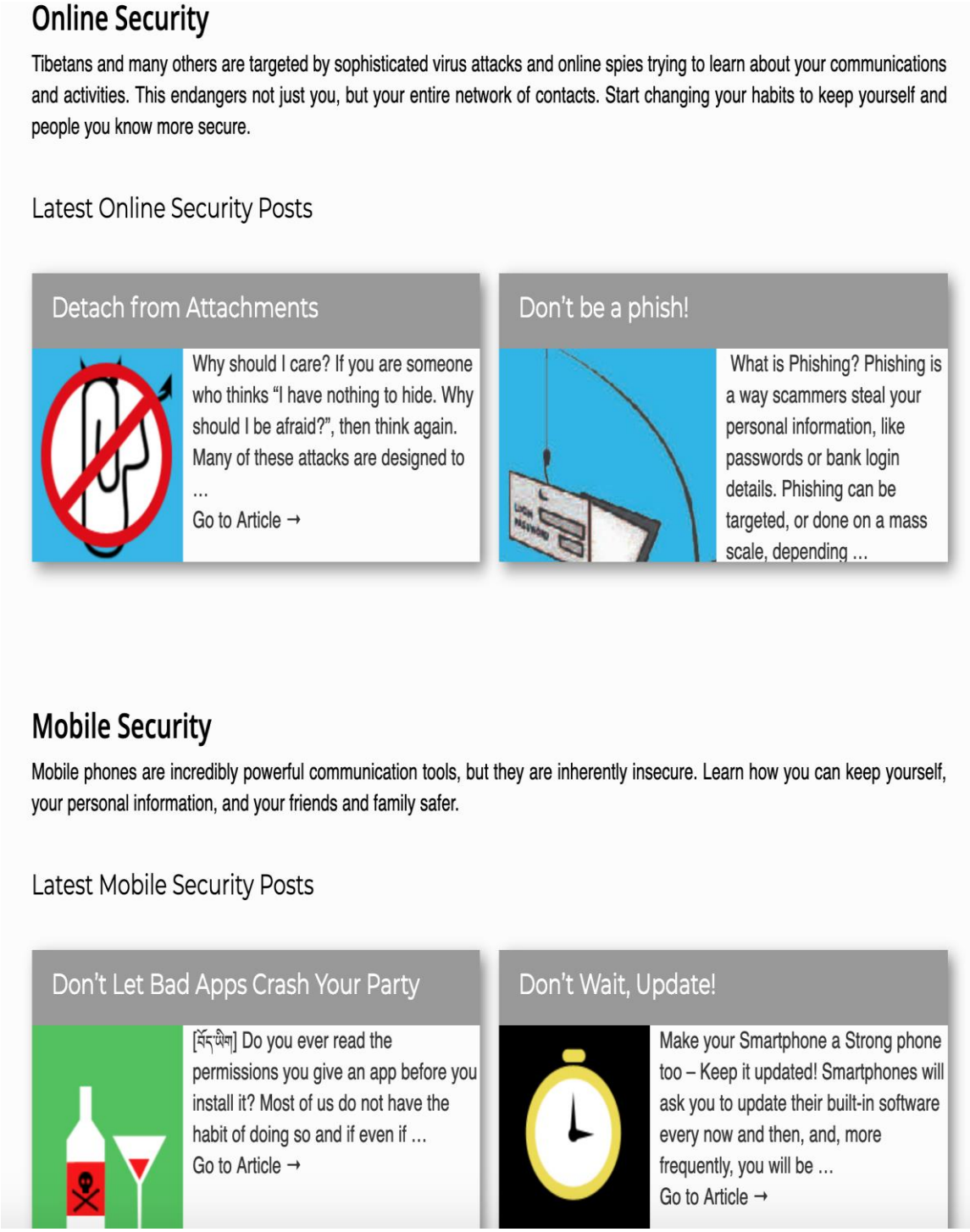

Figure 5.6

Specifically, under the module "Don't Let Bad Apps Crash Your Party", instructions and warnings are given to users about the permissions they give certain apps. While they do not mention any app by name, the warnings should bring to mind issues examined in Chapters 3 and

4 of this thesis, specifically regarding WeChat and Facebook. In the case of WeChat, the site specifically notes that "certain apps" can record conversations and report information to the Chinese government.

A promising project under development currently from the group is what they call "The Tibet Crisis Map" (TAI website 2019).[70] This is a GIS mapping project which utilizes software such as Ushahidi (developed to map reports of violence in Kenya in 2008) and Open Street Map (GPS) to create a real-time visualization of "crisis points" in the Tibetan region. Examples of such incidences would include protests, crackdowns, and natural disasters. This is an exciting project and has implications for transparency within the Tibetan region, provided that workarounds can be found regarding the "Great Firewall" of China (Goldsmith and Wu 2006).

Instagram and Negotiating Transnational Identity

Tibetan identities vary and are negotiated both inside and out of cyberspace and it is through digital mediums such as Instagram and Facebook where those experiences are shared, negotiated and even constructed. This section deals with a case study of cyberspace: the Instagram page of a group called "Youth of Tibet". I have also gathered data through participant observation both online and off in other settings, such as in closed meme groups which I cannot explicitly include posts or identifying information from, ethically. Rather, these anecdotal observations will serve as supplements to larger patterns within the community such as those observed by other scholars. In addition, memes used as evidence herein have been gathered from publicly available sources rather than closed groups from which they may have been reposted.

First, it should be noted that the negotiation of diasporic identity online is not new territory and is predicated by the research of both Victoria Bernal (2005, 2014) and Jennifer M.

[70] https://tibetaction.net/tibet-crisis-map/

Brinkerhoff (2009, 2012), the latter of whom specifically analyzed a case study of Tibetan cyberspace on the now defunct TibetBoard. In her examination of the website, Brinkerhoff (2012) notes that diasporas mobilize online for numerous reasons, such as to cultivate and negotiate identity or to gain political or economic advantage through activism. In the case of the Tibetan diaspora, digital technologies have been used for both.

The Instagram page for "Youth of Tibet" consists of images of youthful Tibetans posted with sometimes large amounts of text describing their lives, struggles, and dreams. Figure 5.7 shows the main page for the account.

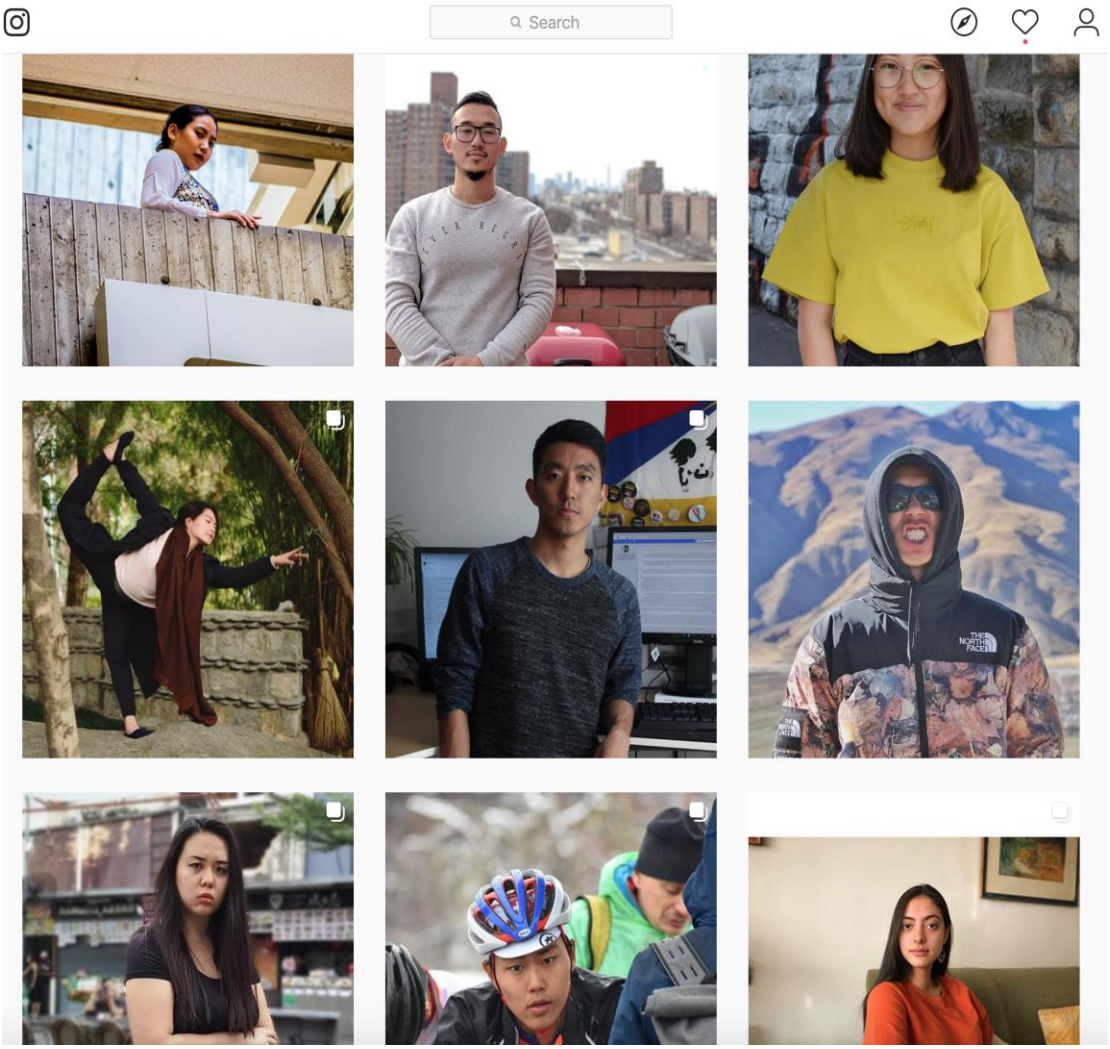

Figure 5.7

The page has 151 posts as of March 2019. Notably, the page does not simply highlight the lives of prominent Tibetans within the community, such as activists or leaders in prominent groups. This, I would argue, would defeat the purpose of the account's existence. Rather, these images and the stories attached to them are digital reminders of the everyday and the variety of the complex and vibrant community that makes up the diaspora. This bit of cyberspace provides a common ground where disparate stories and identities may be collected for all to see. For Tibetans, and indeed many communities in diaspora, this would be significant. Recall Pasang's note that, while nothing could surpass the connection felt through physical meetings, there was something to the scope of representation offered by cyberspace. Specifically, she commented on the dispersal of Tibetan communities and the importance of representation and belonging:

> So, I think in that sense, because of the fact that the Tibetan diaspora is so dispersed, there's no like high concentration unless you live somewhere like Jackson Heights or Toronto, like in Parkdale, like you don't have that concentration of communities. So I think in that sense when you go online right now, for me at least, I have at least a dozen or two accounts that just solely post content about Tibetan culture. And that was like something that wasn't possible even five years ago.

Above I am very deliberate with my words that this page shares lives, struggles, and dreams. The photographer seems to have asked participants to tell them a bit of their biography. Most posts begin with this information, but many times, it seems the post was edited to include only the relevant or most interesting information. Responses tend to involve where the participant is from and how they came to their current situations. Often, they describe their dreams and their hopes for the future of representing the Tibetan diaspora and keeping the culture alive.

Sometimes, the post will focus on the struggle of living in exile. One individual, identified as Tenzin (25)—the center photo in Figure 5.7—related a story of a failed school trip to Shanghai due to suspicious circumstances:

> Our school had planned a one-week trip to Shanghai as part of our studies. Therefore, a school worker collected all our passports and applied for our visa. One week later I got notified that I had randomly been picked to personally apply for my visa at the Chinese embassy in Zurich. As soon as I got there, an employee of the embassy looked at me and my name and told me that I again, randomly got chosen to have an interview. When she wrote down my name for the list of interviewees, I saw that the one above me was a Tenzin as well. I walked in for the interview one week later and the Tibetan interviewer asked me about informations (sic) that were already mentioned in my documents. After that, he got more into politics. "Do you think we're changing Tibet for the better? Are you part of the Tibetan Youth Association? Did you participate in demonstrations?" etc. I answered "Yes, I did and do go to demonstrations." They would've found out anyways. The interview didn't last long after that and he told me they'll keep me updated. But they did not.
>
> Meanwhile, I only had one week left before our departure, the embassy had not taken any of my calls and didn't reply to my professors and my own messages or emails. So I personally went to the embassy again. They told me they couldn't do anything since the documents have been sent to Beijing for further investigations. I didn't know who else to contact so I wrote the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs who provided me with an appointment in the Chinese embassy in Bern. There, I was told that my visa application was refused before it even got to Beijing. I could have applied for a new Visa but with the length of the procedure I would've missed most of the trip.
>
> The airplane left three days later with the other students. The same night I got a call from the embassy in Zurich saying my visa got refused.
>
> I mean I really tried everything you can imagine to get my visa. I even tried to consult the state but nothing I did seemed to help. What bothers me the most isn't even the money I lost. It just would've been a nice trip with my friends and a good ending of our last semester together but I wasn't granted that pleasure. (Youth of Tibet Instagram 2019).

I have included the entirety of his response because it touches on a number of subjects of importance. First, he notes the futility of trying to hide anything from the Chinese state, despite him living in Switzerland. He says "They would have found out anyway." He notes the difficulties of bureaucracy and the frustration he felt at being singled out and told nothing of his visa application.

Other posts range from discussions of issues with mental illness and self-harm to success stories of athletic accomplishments and activism. In each case, dedicated commenters will post

their well-wishes, admirations, and comments of solidarity with those in diaspora. Notably, the trend of the comments returns to either shared experiences of diaspora and the woes that come alongside exile and issues of system harm by a powerful transnational hegemon, in this case China.

Another example of community dialogue online is memes. Since the advent of social media various niched groups have cultivated specific areas of cyberspace where they can develop a sense of community perhaps not possible in the physical world. This has been documented and examined in depth by a number of scholars and I will not expand on the phenomenon here (but see Bernal 2014; Boellstorff 2008; Brinkerhoff 2009; Nardi 2010; Taylor 2006, 2012, 2018). An underlying trend in all of this social science research is that of the concept of "mimetic kinship" (Davidov and Andersen 2008), an extension of the anthropological theory of "fictive kinship" which sees community building as a complex series of connections crafting "inside" and "outside" groups not dependent on biological or legal definitions of kin. Specifically in the case of mimetic kinship, Davidov and Andersen (2008) note that is a community built and defined through online modes of imitation or online tribalism. I will note the ways in which the Tibetan diaspora, particularly Tibetans from North America, engage with social media and "meme groups" and reflect this form of kinship.

A trend of cyberspace in recent years has been the construction of social media pages and groups dedicated to sharing memes, or images that mimic a lived experience of the user. The word "meme" comes from the Greek *mimēma,* which means "that which is imitated", and the word "gene". It was coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* to provide an explanatory framework for how cultural information is disseminated. This comparison to biology welcomed the analogy of viruses and was expanded on by Mike Godwin (1994) in *Wired* to the

Internet. He argued that a meme “is an idea that functions in a mind the same way a gene or virus functions in the body. And an infectious idea (call it a "viral meme") may leap from mind to mind, much as viruses leap from body to body.”[71] That comparison has been immensely helpful to the understanding of memes in popular culture in the modern world and, even further, the understanding of cultural information sharing.

In this way, meme groups offer identity affirmation through the sharing of experiential memes. Over the years a number of groups have attempted to create such mimetic spaces. As pointed out by Brinkerhoff (2009), Tibetans have fostered community dialogue online through forum boards such as TibetBoard (now defunct). In addition, previous platforms that have been used include Myspace, AOL, and an early social networking site that specifically targeted the Asian demographic called AsianAve (founded in 1997). Now, as I have noted, user interaction can occur in numerous online locals, from Facebook to Reddit. Recently, a trend of groups with the name “subtle [insert ethnic or social group] traits” has emerged on Facebook. This is an ethnographer’s dream. The users share what they identify to be quintessential pieces of lived experience that might be missed by an outsider and proves to be one of the better sources of epic perspective I have observed. Tibetans, specifically, have created such a group with almost 3,000 members as of this writing. I cannot divulge its name as it is a closed group (I was invited by a participant), but I will share what memes I can find which are available publicly and have been observed in such groups.

Figure 5.8 shows some examples of these memes. In order from the top left and moving clockwise, I will examine the memes briefly for clarity. The “one does not simply…” meme template was popular throughout the early to mid-2010s. It seeks to reference something

[71] https://www.wired.com/1994/10/godwin-if-2/

difficult, or exaggerate a tough choice. In this case, the creator seeks to illustrate the difficulty some Tibetan youth face in learning to read, write, and speak Tibetan in diaspora. Next, the image of actor Liam Neeson is taken from the film Taken and is referencing the rather ubiquitous nature of the name "Tenzin" among Tibetans. In the bottom left, the image of a skeleton illustrates how the creator feels about the pressure faced by Tibetan youth to marry and procreate. The last image is more subtle and can be confusing to those who are not familiar with Tibetan online humor. A common joke in the online Tibetan diaspora community is that "momos" (Tibetan dumplings) are the main staple of the ethnic Tibetan diet. In this image, the joke is that the crying woman is expressing disappointment that the Irish bar, where, of course, one would not expect to find Tibetan dumplings, is out of momos. The humor is in the idea that Tibetans wish to find momos everywhere. There is a similar meme that shows Tibetan blood containing momos instead of red blood cells.

Large trends tend to be focused on Tibetan food, such as the momo (dumpling). As with internet memes in general, there are brief periods of time in which posters will focus on certain topics. For example, during Losar (Tibetan New Year), posters will share experiences related to the celebrations. For a month after Losar, posts tended to involve momos (making them or eating them) in some way. As Pasang noted, this shared cultural experience, especially related to shared celebrations and culinary practices, is important in fostering a sense of community in diaspora.

As with Instagram, the comments section on these posts is where either the affirmation or negotiation of these cultural experiences and practices occur. One notable example occurred on February 22, 2019 (the post is now deleted, so I rely on my field notes). In a comment thread responding to a meme on Tibetan endogamy (pressure to marry inside the group), an individual posted "no enji (non-Tibetan) wife pls!" This apparently upset another community member and

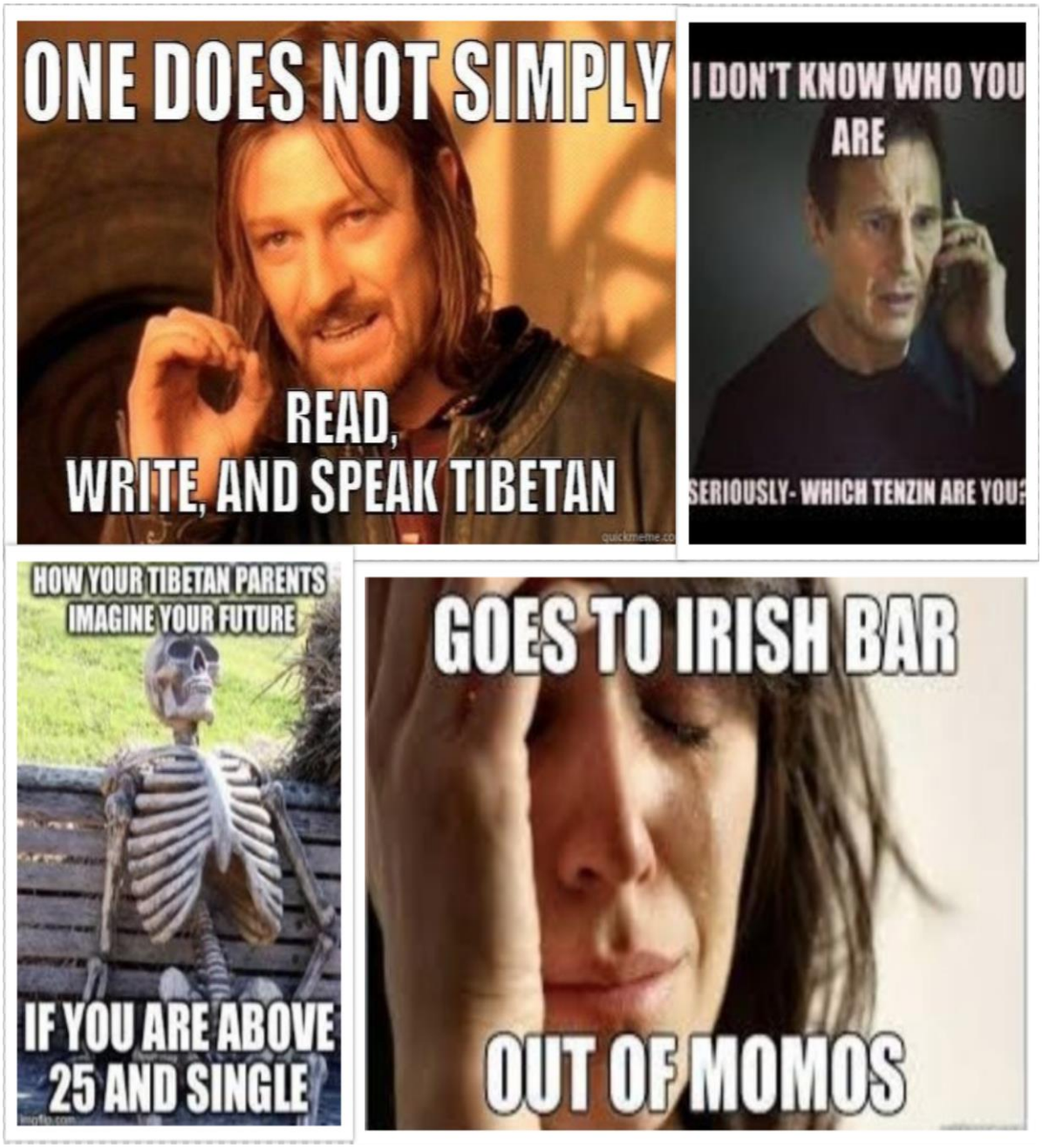

Figure 5.8

she posted a screenshot to the larger group shaming the individual, writing "Can someone please tell [username] that love is love!" This was not the only time where this part of the Tibetan lived experience was noted and negotiated. Another meme (Figure 5.9) noted the anxiety one user felt about how Tibetan parents (in this case *amala*, which means "mother") felt about catching Tibetan youth dating outsiders (*enji*).

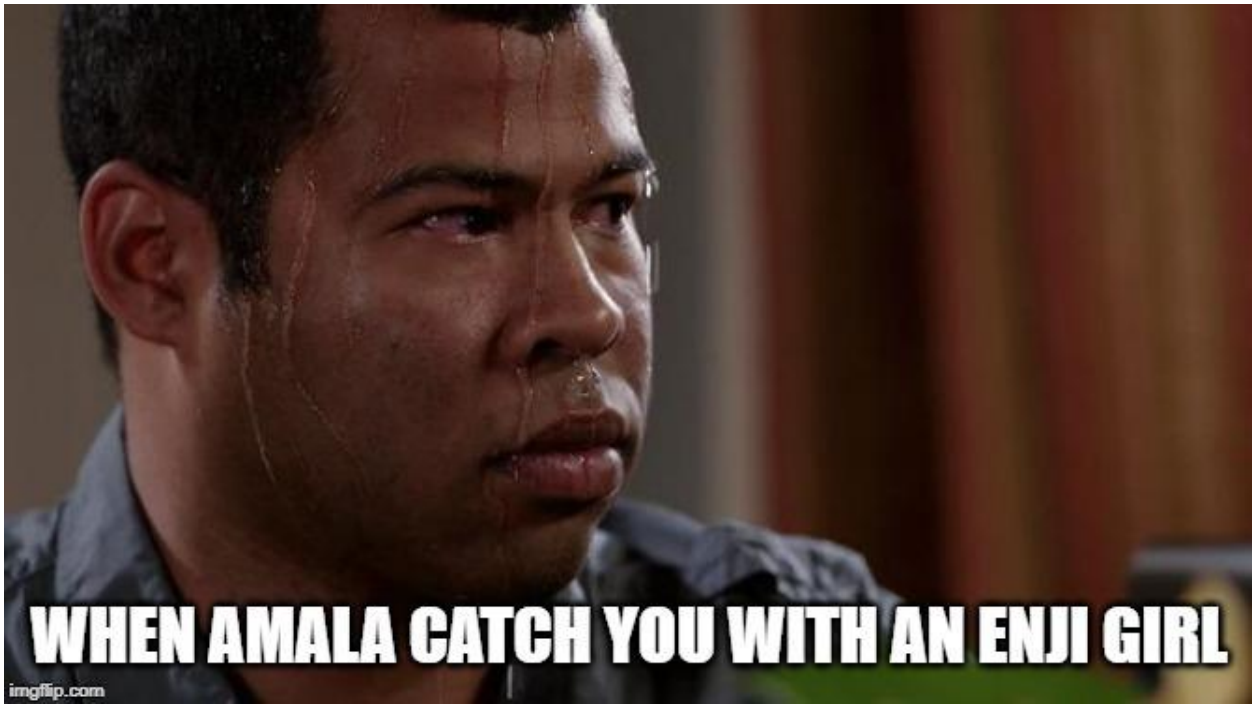

Figure 5.9

Typically, users will respond by either connecting with the distress of the image or arguing that it is outdated and their parents do not care who they date, so long as they are happy. It would be wrong to discount the pressure Tibetans feel to court and marry other Tibetans in diaspora. Sara Conrad, in a paper presented at the Central States Anthropological Society Conference (2018), observed that there is a pressure, specifically among Tibetan women and solidified by the suggestion of the Dalai Lama, for Tibetans to practice endogamy and produce many children. Further, she noted that the CTA even provides incentives for Tibetan women to have many children, noting a form of biopolitical influence over women in diaspora (Foucault 1984). Lauer (2015) examined such debates and anxieties in her survey of second generation individuals in Switzerland, pointing to similar trends such as negotiating marrying outside the group and anxieties around language competency. Her conclusion was that "[the] study resulted in a completely heterogenous set of results that can only conclude with the caveat that a myriad of socialization processes must be taken into account when determining what is or is not Tibetan,"

(184). In other words, what is or is not Tibetan is individually negotiated and determined both in conjunction with the shared experience of peers and outside the boundaries of a monolithic culture complex.

That being said, there are trends and overlapping experiences that can be identified, as noted above. What is of interest in this thesis is how these individuals use cyber-groups to reproduce, translate, share, and negotiate a communal sense of Tibetan identity in diaspora.

Digital Narratives and Identity Online

This examination of Tibetan contributions to cyberspace has demonstrated a number of things. Largely, as the title of the chapter would suggest, the theme underlying this writing deals with *being* Tibetan *online*. I do not argue that these two things are dichotomous. One is at once Tibetan and online and, as participants argued, cyberspace does not make one feel any more or less Tibetan; however, the digital tools and environments which have been examined do show novel ways in which Tibetan activism and identity are shaped, negotiated, and re-shaped.

Homi Bhaba (2004) has argued that the location of culture can be determined through the texts we produce, which cannot be understood in a horizontal manner, but rather through the interpretation and reinterpretation of those text by a "tribe of interpreters" and translators (202). He also argues that the nation does not conform to boundaries of states, calling on the arguments of the imagined community by Anderson (1983) and Said's (1978) analysis of the imagining of the "orient" by the West. This brings to mind the criticisms of Wimmer and Schiller (2002) of scholars who stick to methodological nationalism, or the insistence that nations may be understood in geographically bounded terms.

An alternative in this digital age has been identified by Victoria Bernal in her work *Nation as Network* (2014), in which she argued that the nation is networked across numerous mediums of

interactions, including information technology. In the case of the Tibetan diaspora these texts, such a memes, biographies, and activist initiatives are disseminated and interpreted across distances through techno and mediascapes (Appadarai 1996) like Instagram and Twitter.

Bhaba (2004) and Bernal (2014) both agree that narrative and texts of a nation are negotiated among stakeholders. The latter specifically argued that "the public sphere is self-reflexive, in that posts reflect on other posts and on the larger history and context of other posts," (76). This provides insight into the digital community as being made of diverse individuals with backgrounds that identify with a common heritage (Tibetan) bonding over the shared experiences and negotiating their differences. There is not one answer or framework that can divine the essence of "being Tibetan (online)"; rather, there is a multitude of answers that highlight the diverse nature of the diaspora as a whole.

With that, there is also to be found a more common framework that can help to generalize the *patterns* of the use of digital technology. Kyra Landzelius (2006) identified the *inreach-outreach* continuum to distinguish the ways in which indigenous and diasporic peoples tend to utilize internet technologies. In this framework, internet technologies may be used for either the purpose of tending to community and digitizing tradition and experience (in-reach) or the activism and advertising of related causes to gain allies outside their community (outreach). This chapter has examined both ends of the continuum and I argue that such a framework is very useful in the understanding and improving the use of digital technology at either end.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

I began this thesis research with the goal to discover the complicated ways in which new digital technologies and media have been adopted and subsequently brought change to Tibetans in diaspora and, specifically, the US. What I have attempted to demonstrate are the myriad ways in which digital information technology both limits and frees marginalized populations such as Tibetans. Whereas globalization and transnational governmentally have been made more ubiquitous and efficient than ever before, these technologies leave room for the agency and negotiation of identity within such communities.

This thesis has grappled with two primary themes that formed my research questions. The first involved transnational hegemony of the state and to what extent transnational governmentally (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) affected citizens living outside of that state. More importantly, how is such a process affected by digital technology? Herein I have provided evidence to the point that transnational governmentality is made more efficient through mediums such as Twitter and Facebook. Specifically, this is so due to increased efficiency in surveillance and what Foucault (1977) referred to as "panopticism", put simply as the willingness of the individual to become bearer of their own oppression through self-censorship and the surveillance of their peers. In effect, the state need not launch a large surveillance apparatus (though they do) because those considered within the nation do so themselves. We saw this process at work with Roy Jones, the Marriot Hotels employee who was fired for 'liking' a tweet (Ma 2018a) as well as with the testimony of my participants and through the comments found online.

This "long arm" of the state is troubling and becomes doubly so when such an apparatus of power is allowed or aided in propagating itself through digital infrastructures and a global neoliberal economic model. As outlined in the Chapters 1 and 4, this has already been shown to

have tragic results. Couple this with global political and economic inequalities throughout the globalized world and one sees that only certain populations truly have access and authority online (Srinivasan 2017), which, as technology becomes more and more prevalent and ubiquitous for modern society, will further perpetuate inequality and oppression in said populations. With that being said, the evidence I have gathered would suggest that, despite the best efforts of some state actors, marginalized populations are not totally silenced in digital spaces. In fact, the opposite reveals itself to be true.

The second theme of this thesis, and the primary purpose of my inquiry, was how Tibetan individuals in diaspora, primarily within the United States, but not excluding other English speaking populations, respond to the above. How do Tibetans adopt digital technologies in their daily lives and what part do they play in the maintenance of culture in diaspora? Do they show agency and resistance to the transnational hegemony of the Chinese state and if so how? This varies largely depending on the background of the person you ask. The philosophy, priorities, and engagement vary between individuals; however, larger themes are identifiable among the disparities.

First, obviously Tibetan NGOs and activist groups maintain a presence online and demonstrate some agency and resistance through their promotions and initiatives. In this way, they exemplify the concept of the "freedom technologist" as an individual who uses new digital media as a tool for greater freedom in causes they feel passionate about. Beyond that realm of activism, Tibetans engage in cyberspace in a unique way. For many Tibetans, closed groups and group chats in messaging applications such as WeChat and Facebook allow for a space in which their cultural identity (being one that faces challenges in diaspora) can be negotiated, practiced, and replicated more reliably. Internet memes in particular, in keeping with their linguistic roots

(Dawkins 1976; Godwin 1993), are viral mimicries of the lived-in reality of Tibetans in diaspora. The sharing of memes serves as a sort of mirror in which other Tibetans may observe them and see their own reality reflected in that of those who post and react to them. They engage digitally in a form of cultural production and reproduction through these memes. Moreover, in the comments section, the culture of Tibetans in diaspora may be negotiated and certain cultural views or priorities may be challenged or rejected entirely.

Therefore, in this concluding chapter, I would like to highlight some of the implications of my research. These will have to do largely with political implications, but will also touch on NGO involvement in and around the subject of Tibet as well as the ethics of technology design and research.

The year 2018 was significant for being a year fraught with concern over the political implications of digital technology. Facebook was criticized heavily for its use of user data and the data brokerage market as a whole. Specifically, they received large amounts of backlash regarding their role (identified by the UN) in the Rohingya Crisis in Myanmar and the data breach scandal of Cambridge Analytica. Both instances have inspired debates as to the danger posed by such unregulated technology which has so fundamentally changed how humans interact with and understand the world around them. Mark Zuckerberg was called to testify before the US Congress. Sundar Pichai, Google's CEO, was also so called when controversy sprung up around the leaked "Project Dragonfly".

Specific anxieties have arisen regarding international interference and espionage. For example, controversies which have recently been the focus of attention include Russian interference in the 2016 American election and the American suspicion of Chinese tech company Huawei of being a spy apparatus of the Chinese state. These topics continue to be discussed and

debated as to their urgency and the implications of regulating or not regulating such technologies.

Perhaps this thesis can be some start to providing evidence to the argument that such technologies provide power to state entities as they do agency to individual actors. It is also important in a discussion of geopolitics and technology to remember that not all of the world maintains the same access to technology (Srinivasan 2017). Development is uneven across the world and in a globalized world increasingly dependent on digital technologies for political and economic power, it will become equally important to consider such imbalance. In addition to this, human rights has and will become a large issue worthy of discussion. As examined in Chapter 4, China, as an infopolitcal state (Bernal 2014), has done much to limit both information coming into and leaving its borders via the internet—The Great Firewall of China. There have been efforts by journalists, activist groups, and NGOs to shed light on issues a state may wish concealed. Technology obscures as much as it enlightens in the globalized world. It should be the goal of researchers, developers, and activists to make technology more transparent, not less. Efforts already in motion towards this goal include the "Tibet Crisis Map" by the Tibetan Action Institute and various encrypted communication technologies such as WhatsApp.

Neoliberalism thrives on obscurity whether that be the trade networks which prevent consumers from knowing the production process of their items like shoes or phones or what happens to their data when they agree to the terms and conditions of an application. Recently, a United States Senator and presidential hopeful argued that big-tech (companies like Facebook and Google) should be broken up, evidencing the mounting pressure being placed on the field of technology (Martínez 2019)[72].

[72] https://www.wired.com/story/facebook-not-monopoly-but-should-broken-up/

Future Research

Future research and debate should be focused on how such large technology companies can be made more transparent or regulated in a way that protects the civil and human rights of users worldwide. Cybersecurity and transparent digital practices are also key discussion which need to be rigorously studied as our society becomes increasingly depending on information technology.

Social scientists specifically would be of great use to this endeavor. Already anthropologists like Genevieve Bell (Dourish and Bell 2011) bring human research to IT companies like Intel. This trend of social scientists taking up positions in large tech companies should continue and be encouraged. Digitally inclined social scientists would also be of particular use employed in NGOs with goals of evening the technological development of the world, so long as they have been trained in the creation of that binary and constructed third-world dynamic (Escobar 1995). Those with training in social sciences are cognizant of the above issues would be better suited to hold positions of power in such institutions rather than someone who thinks nothing of such implications.

From an academic perspective, further research should be pursued in two vital areas: 1) in the study of "freedom technologists" (Postill 2014) and the deployment of digital technologies in activism and community making and 2) in the design of these technologies to make for a more transparent and intuitive technological future. I also do not argue that this thesis has been exhaustive in understanding the geopolitical complexities and ramifications of diaspora, refugees, state surveillance, or Tibetans and technology specifically. Rather, I consider this an introduction to larger applied goals in which academics, researchers, developers, and activists work to improve access and freedom in the digital world.

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Appendix A: Tibetan Terms

Amala = means “mother”.
Chuba = refers to a type of coat typically (but not always) worn by Tibetan women. It is usually made from a thick wool.
Enji = means “outsider”.
Khata = ceremonial scarf usually made from silk. It is used often in Tibetan Buddhism in blessing ceremonies. Specifically, the scarf is given to another (usually a monk) by placing it around their shoulders and is then returned to the first as a sign of blessing.
Lhakar = means “white” or “pure”.
Momo = Tibetan dumplings.
Rangzen = “independence” or “freedom”.
Stupa = A type of Buddhist shrine typically housing relics important to practitioners.
Thangka = Traditional Tibetan art form usually depicting Buddhist deities, events, or history on a textile canvas.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Questions:

1. How many hours a week do you typically spend on digital media platforms?
2. How many of those hours are related to Tibetan cultural practices or groups?
3. What apps or sites do you use?
4. Which of these do you use most often and why?
5. How do these digital media technologies influence, in your view, Tibetan cultural expression and preservation.
6. Do you feel more "Tibetan" when engaging with these cyber communities?
7. As opposed to physical meetings?
8. Do you feel that digital technologies are a help or hindrance to Tibetan cultural causes or preservation?
9. How do you receive news related to Tibet?
10. Do you engage in political discussion relating to Tibet online?
11. Do you feel safe in online communities when discussing these topics? Why or why not?
12. Do you have any experiences with censorship online, in any situation?
13. How do you feel about Chinese influence in digital spaces?

Appendix C: IRB Documents

Consent Document

Study Title: ***The Long Arm of the State: Tibetan Diaspora and Transnational Hegemony***

Study Purpose and Rationale
The purpose of this study is to better understand how individuals in the Tibetan community perceive outside influence and how digital technologies play a part in their daily cultural lives.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria
Those considered for this study include members of the Tibetan cultural community, either directly or tangentially. Only individuals over the age of 18 will be considered for this study. Members of the community who do not speak English must be excluded from the study.

Participation Procedures and Duration
Your participation in this study includes sitting for an interview with a minimum duration of thirty minutes and answering the researcher's questions based on your personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Audio or Video Tapes
The researcher wishes to record interviews with participants only for the purpose of keeping track of responses. The audio recording will only ever be in the procession of the researcher and will not be used for any purpose outside of this study.

Data Confidentiality or Anonymity
All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of the data. A translator should not be necessary, but if the English-speaking participant insists and provides one, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Storage of Data and Data Retention Period
All data collected, including the audio recording, will be placed in either a secure cabinet in the researcher's office or on a password protected external drive. All data gathered for this research will be destroyed after two years.

Risks or Discomforts
Some of the questions pertinent to this research will pertain to Chinese state policy and authority and therefore may be uncomfortable to discuss. Fear of any political consequences for the participant or community members is acknowledged and respected.

Benefits
There are no perceived benefits for participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at anytime for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this form and at any time during the study.

IRB Contact Information
For one's rights as a research subject, you may contact the following: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070 or at irb@bsu.edu.

Study Title ***The Long Arm of the State: Tibetan Diaspora and Transnational Hegemony***

****

Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in this research project entitled, ***The Long Arm of the State: Tibetan Diaspora and Transnational Hegemony*** I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

To the best of my knowledge, I meet the inclusion/exclusion criteria for participation (described on the previous page) in this study.

_____ _____

Participant's Signature Date

Researcher Contact Information

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Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
2000 University Avenue
Muncie, IN 47306-0155
Phone: 765-285-5070

DATE:	May 31, 2018
TO:	Jordan Keck, BA
FROM:	Ball State University IRB
RE:	IRB protocol # 1243804-1
TITLE:	The Long Arm of the State: Tibetan Diaspora and Transnational Hegemony
SUBMISSION TYPE:	New Project
ACTION:	APPROVED
DECISION DATE:	May 30, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE:	May 31, 2020
REVIEW TYPE:	**Expedited:** This protocol had been determined by the board to meet the definition of minimal risk.

The Institutional Review Board has approved your New Project for the above protocol, effective May 30, 2018 through May 31, 2020. All research under this protocol must be conducted in accordance with the approved submission and in accordance with the principles of the Belmont Report.

Review Type:

	Category 1: Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices

	Category 2: Collection of blood samples by Finger stick, Heel stick, Ear stick, or Venipuncture
	Category 3: Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by noninvasive means
	Category 4: Collection of data through Non-Invasive Procedures Routinely Employed in Clinical Practice, excluding procedures involving Material (Data, Documents, Records, or Specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis)
	Category 5: Research involving materials that have been collected or will be collected solely for non-research purposes.
	Category 6: Collection of Data from Voice, Video, Digital, or Image Recordings Made for Research Purposes

X	**Category 7:** Research on Individual or Group Characteristics or Behavior or Research Employing Survey, Interview Oral History, Focus Group, Program Evaluation, Human Factors, Evaluation, or Quality Assurance Methodologies
	Category 8: Continuing review of research previously approved by the convened IRB
	Category 9: Continuing review of research, not conducted under an investigational new drug application or investigational device exemption where categories 2-8 do not apply but the IRB has determined and documented at a convened meeting that the research involves no greater than minimal risk and not additional risks have been identified.

Editorial Notes:

1. Approved

As a reminder, it is the responsibility of the P.I. and/or faculty sponsor to inform the IRB in a timely manner:

- when the project is completed,
- if the project is to be continued beyond the approved end date,
- if the project is to be modified,
- if the project encounters problems, or
- if the project is discontinued.

Any of the above notifications must be addressed in writing and submitted electronically to the IRB (http:// www.bsu.edu/irb). Please reference the IRB protocol number given above in any communication to the IRB regarding this project. Be sure to allow sufficient time for review and approval of requests for modification or continuation. If you have questions, please contact Sandra Currie at (765) 285-5052 or slcurrie@bsu.edu.

In the case of an adverse event and/or unanticipated problem, you will need to submit written documentation of the event to IRBNet under this protocol number and you will need to directly notify the Office of Research Integrity (http://www.bsu.edu/irb) **within 5 business days**. If you have questions, please contact (ORI Staff).
Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project or as required under Federal and/or State regulations (ex. HIPAA, FERPA, etc.). Additional requirements may apply.

D. Clark Dickin, PhD/Chair
Institutional Review Board

Christopher Mangelli, JD, MS, MEd, CIP/
Director
Office of Research Integrity